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**THE NEXT RELIGION
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL**

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LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN
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THE NEXT RELIGION
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1912

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TO

FREDERICK WHELEN
THE CHIVALROUS CHAMPION
OF ALL FORLORN HOPES
FROM PERSIA TO THE BRITISH
DRAMA

ACT I
THE PARSONAGE IN DYMTHORPE

ACT II
THE LODGINGS IN WHITECHAPEL

ACT III
THE VESTRY IN ST. THOMAS'S TEMPLE

Over two years elapse between Acts I and II

Nearly ten years elapse between Acts II and III

Characters

**REV. STEPHEN TRAME
SIR THOMAS McFADDEN
HAL McFADDEN, M.D., M.R.C.S., ETC.
THE BISHOP OF THE SOUDAN
SQUIRE ROWLEY
SILÁS BURR
ELI OAKSHOTT
WILFRED TRAME
ANDREWS
CLARIBEL MALLING
SOPHIA
JOANNA BURR
MARY TRAME**

Choristers and Villagers

Act I

The study and best room of Dymthorpe Parsonage on a sunny September morning—a charming old-world room with oaken beams giving by a diamond-paned casement on a piece of sward which leads to the churchyard and the village church. Another window R.C. with a cushioned seat. In the L. corner of the room is a cosy corner; in the R. corner a cottage piano; in the centre a writing-table holding a litter of papers, a spectacle-case, a microscope on its R. side, and a typewriter in the middle. The door R. down stage leads to the passage, the door L.C. to the Rev. Stephen Trame's bedroom. Round the sides of the room are bookshelves with books preponderantly massive and old. The few pictures are of a religious cast, including one photograph of a group of black savages in top-hats.

SOPHIA, a rustic servant in cap and apron, appears to the door R. ushering in an elegant, clever-faced gentleman of thirty-two with a pointed moustache, an air of youth and gaiety, and a shade of dissipation. HAL MCFADDEN, an M.D. who does not practise, holds in his hand a motoring cap with goggles attached.

SOPHIA*

Oh, I thought the Vicar was here. I'll look in the church—it be only a few rods. [Exit R.]

HAL

Thank you. Oh [He follows her] and will you please tell my chauffeur—[The door bangs in his face.] Why are

pretty girls always in such a hurry? . . . Never mind! [Goes to window R.C., opens it and calls] Parker!

CHAUFFEUR [*Outside*]
Yessir?

HAL

While I'm waiting, you might get some petrol in the village.

CHAUFFEUR [*Outside*]
Looks too sleepy, sir.

HAL

That blacksmith we just passed will tell you. [A lark sings. Then there is the sound of the car driving off R. HAL closes the window, and turning espies the microscope] He's still got my wedding present. . . . And there's something on the slide too! [Peers into it.] Tubercle bacilli—who's got consumption, I wonder?

[Door L.C. opens gently; a spectacled, stooping, scholarly figure appears in rather dusty clerical costume, reading a book held close to his eyes. The REV. STEPHEN TRAME is scarcely older than his visitor, yet has none of his youth. His hair is streaked with grey, his face lined with thought. Surprised to find an apparent stranger bent over his microscope, he stops, and coughs to draw his attention.]

HAL [*Looking up with a start*]
Oh, I beg your pardon!

STEPHEN [*Eagerly*]
That's never Hal's voice !

HAL
Yes it is, you blooming bat.

STEPHEN [*Laughingly*]
Well, I'm glad to *hear* you.
[Approaches him and shakes hands affectionately.]

HAL
I hope my microscope hasn't made your eyes worse.

STEPHEN
No more than my telescope.

HAL
You've got a telescope too ? Sounds still more unprofessional . . . Though after all [*Laughing*] Heaven is your speciality. And how's Mrs. Trame ?

STEPHEN
Splendid—always so sunny. I'm sorry she's out on her charity rounds. You see the Squire's lady has such low spirits that all the parish work falls on Mary. And to-night, too, is our Harvest Thanksgiving, and the choir is so backward she has to practise the hymns in their dinner-hour.

HAL
Is she the organist also ?

STEPHEN
Of course.

HAL

When does she find time for the children ?

STEPHEN

Oh, there's only the boy !

HAL

What ! A British parson and only one kid !

STEPHEN

Unfortunately ! Mary has had an illness—I can tell
you as a doctor—there will be no more children.
Won't you sit down ? [Offers arm-chair.]

HAL [*Murmuring*]

I'm sorry. [Sits.] Well, and is the boy turning out
a genius like his father ?

STEPHEN [*Smiling*].

Not like his father. But he's got music from his
mother. Really he's a bit of an infant prodigy.

HAL

How jolly !

STEPHEN

And you—after all these years ?

HAL

Is it all these years ? Yes, I suppose it is ! You and
I left Oxford when *The Merry Milliner* was running.

[Begins whistling a waltz tune.]

STEPHEN [*Holding up hand*]
Please ! And your father ? Still inventing those dreadful guns ?

HAL

Yes—and still wanting me to practise my profession. As an antidote to his, I suppose ! Poor old dad. He's in the States now, worrying over armaments for aeroplanes.

STEPHEN

And of such murderers our civilisation makes millionaires.

HAL [*Laughingly*]
I see you haven't changed !

SOPHIA [*Opening door R.*]
I can't find him—oh, there he be. [Retreats.]

HAL [*Who is near R., rising*]
Why, what's your hurry ? [Door bangs in his face.]

STEPHEN
I see *you* haven't changed either.

HAL
Oh yes, I have—I'm a changed man !

STEPHEN
I'm glad to hear it.

HAL

Ha ! You think I've found religion !

STEPHEN

Haven't you ?

HAL

No—something better—a bride !

STEPHEN [*Starting up*]

You ! You going to be married ?

HAL

Yes, me ! That's what I've come to you for . . .

STEPHEN

Come to me for ?

HAL

I want you to tie the knot.

STEPHEN

I marry *you* ! *You* whose sneers at Holy Matrimony
were only second to your sneers at Holy Church !

HAL

Oh well, marriage is like death—we all come to it.

STEPHEN

I shouldn't mind *burying* you.

HAL

Thank you !

STEPHEN

I don't mean it unkindly—but a corpse can't help itself. But as for marrying you, why in heaven's name should you want *my* services ?

HAL

Precisely in heaven's name. Helen—Miss Munro—doesn't believe that marriage outside a church is registered in heaven.

STEPHEN

But London is not destitute of churches.

HAL

No, they're almost as thick as beershops.

STEPHEN

Then, why——?

HAL

Because—oh, confound it, old chap—don't you see that as a free-thinker I've got *my* scruples too ! And to hear a clergyman go through all that canting stuff would spoil my wedding-day.

STEPHEN

But am *I* not a clergyman ?

HAL

No—you're an old pal. I'm used to *you* talking nonsense. I can pretend to Helen I *must* have my dear old college chum to see me through. But a church —O Lord ! [Shudders.]

STEPHEN

Perhaps you'll deny next that mine is a church !

HAL

It isn't a church—it's the country. [*Goes to side-window and points.*] Your ivy-clad tower rises from that sunlit grass like a piece of nature, almost like another tree. We could get a special licence and motor down—it would be more like a picnic than a prayer-meeting. Do, old chap ; I've set my heart on it.

STEPHEN

No really, Hal, you must excuse me.

HAL

But why ?

STEPHEN

Because— [*Hesitates.*] Well, I'd rather not.

HAL

You are robbing your poor-box.

STEPHEN

Money that comes out of cannon ! My poor-box would spue it up.

HAL

Not if Helen put it in—*her* money comes out of millinery—no, no, not *Merry Millinery*—she's the heiress of Munro's Emporium—most respectable Church of England people.

STEPHEN

And all this while I've forgotten to congratulate you.
[Shakes his hand.] I hope you'll be happy.

HAL

Thank you. Then you *will* marry me.

STEPHEN [Dropping his hand]

No! No! No! It would be a mockery.

HAL

I know I've been a butterfly. But what about the joy in heaven over the sinner that repenteth?

STEPHEN

You don't believe in heaven and you haven't repented.

HAL

I've repented of being a bachelor. And what I believe is my own affair. Look here! You are taking advantage of your private knowledge of me. The Church has not the right to refuse me. I was baptized.

STEPHEN

Were you? I thought your father hates Christianity.

HAL

Hates it like poison—like poison sold as food. But mother had me christened—she was dying, you know, and he couldn't resist her.

STEPHEN

Humph! And so it goes . . . Rotten through and through, the whole system. [*The door R. flies open abruptly and a pretty little curly-headed boy of six appears. Impatiently.*] What is it now, Wilfred?

WILFRED

I want to play the piano.

[*Goes to it.*]

STEPHEN

No, no, don't you see there's a visitor? [*The boy retreats sulkily.*] Come and say how do you do?

WILFRED [*Retreating*]

I'm too busy.

HAL [*His whole manner softening*]

Oh, come and give me a kiss.

WILFRED

Don't want to.

STEPHEN

Don't be rude, Wilfred. Say how do you do, like a little gentleman.

WILFRED [*Smiling mischievously*]

How do you do like a little gentleman? [*Opens piano.*]

STEPHEN

No, no, not now. Run away and play.

WILFRED

I'm playing. [Strikes opening chords of harvest hymn.]

HAL

Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! [Pats his head affectionately.] Can you play *The Merry Milliner* ?

STEPHEN [Shutting the piano with paternal authoritativeness]

We are talking—you shall look down my microscope.

WILFRED [Blubbering]

But I want to play the harvest hymns.

STEPHEN [Leading him to the door]

Yes, dear, later on.

WILFRED [Crying]

But I want to play now.

STEPHEN

Well, play your trumpet—not too near here.

[Putting him outside.]

WILFRED [Blubbering]

But I want to play the piano.

STEPHEN [Calling at door]

Sophia ! Do keep Master Wilfred quiet !

SOPHIA [Outside]

Come along, dearie, I've got a goody !

WILFRED [*Screaming*]

Don't want goodies ! [STEPHEN closes the door on him.]

HAL [*Smiling at the screams*]

There's no doubt he's musical! . . . [Resuming argument.] So you see, I being a member of the Church of England, you have no option. And I want the ceremony got through before dad returns from the States.

STEPHEN [*Decisively*]

I cannot marry you. It would be a mockery, I tell you.

HAL

Because I'm not really a Christian ?

STEPHEN

No ! Because [*He looks round nervously, then closes casement, which slightly darkens the room*], because I'm not really a Christian !

HAL [*Whistling*]

Whew ! . . . You're not serious ?

STEPHEN

As serious as Dante when he came up out of hell. The Church seems to me like one of those inland ports from which the sea has receded. The tides of Truth beat elsewhere.

HAL

You've come round to *my* views ? What fun !

STEPHEN

No. I have *not* come round to *your* views. But you always had for me the fascination of opposites. Do you know that in my High Church Oxford days I looked on you as a temptation from the devil—nay, sometimes almost as the devil himself !

HAL [*Facetiously*]

The devil you did !

STEPHEN

Mephisto casting his baleful shadow over the mediæval sanctities of spire and tower. And yet behind all your terrible sophistry there was truth.

HAL

I am glad you give the devil his due.

STEPHEN

Yes, but the devil's truth comes by denying—God's truth by affirming. From more faith, not from less ! The next religion will be larger than Christianity, not smaller ; harder, not easier.

HAL

The next religion ! What the dickens is that ?

STEPHEN

The religion all honest men are coming to—the religion the world is thirsting for—

HAL

Go on, go on—I'm thirsting now.

STEPHEN

The religion that accepts the Revelation of Science.

HAL [*Disappointed*]

Science! Why, that's only what dad believes in.

STEPHEN

I'm glad your father believes in *something*.

HAL

Yes—because science is the enemy of religion.

STEPHEN

Only so long as religion neglects to *love* its enemy.
Only so long as religion refuses to acknowledge the true God.

HAL

And which of man's many gods is that?

STEPHEN

The only one that has never been accepted—the God of Law. The God who will send tuberculosis even through the Communion chalice. [*Points to microscope.*] Those bacilli you were looking at came from mine.

HAL

I see my microscope has done its work.

STEPHEN

Yes, but not in *your* sense. Why we should give up

God because He is shown to be infinitely larger than the God of our fathers I cannot imagine. All we are entitled to deny is that He coddles the individual or doles out death and life in answer to prayer.

HAL

Ha ! Then in the next religion there won't be any prayer.

STEPHEN

Not in the sense of asking for favours. What favours *can* there be in a universe of law ? Can you save the plague-stricken millions of India by prayer, or will the famine in China abate under our psalms ?

HAL [*Smiling*]

Just what I used to ask *you* ! Only at that rate you can't have thanksgivings either—these harvest hymns —what ?

STEPHEN

Of course not. As if heaven scared the crows and counted the ears of corn ! Ugh ! [Shudders.] And then you come to me and ask me to read the Marriage Service over you !

HAL

Why not ? You read it over others.

STEPHEN

Over my flock, sheep as they are. Over my brainless gentry, and my bovine clodhoppers. I can just bear

doing that—habit has dulled the edge of hypocrisy. But do you think I could look *you* in the face and babble that obsolete stuff ? Could I ask a blessing on *your* marriage from the God of Abraham, that Mesopotamian polygamist ? Could I exhort you to live as faithfully with Helen Munro as Isaac with Rebekah ?

HAL

O Lord ! Do *they* come into it ?

STEPHEN

Even Adam and Eve come into it.

HAL

Really ? Naked and unashamed ?

STEPHEN

Don't jest. I who know that the sun is only one of the twenty million stars of the Milky Way, and the Milky Way itself only a pin-point in the endless universe, have to prate of the creation of Adam and his rib on this poky little planet. Talk of spoiling your wedding-day—don't you see how this sort of stuff spoils *all* my days ?

HAL

Then why not chuck it ?

STEPHEN

Ah, if I only could ! If I could be the prophet of the next religion !

HAL

What blocks the way ?

MARY [*Singing as she passes by door R.*]

“Come, ye thankful people, come,

Raise the song of Harvest Home,” &c. &c. •

[*Song dies away gradually.*]

STEPHEN

There's your answer.

HAL

Your wife ?

STEPHEN

It would break her heart.

HAL

So you break yours instead.

STEPHEN

That is my only consolation. That I suffer. That I do not stagnate like the majority of us parsons. That the truth I dare not utter is a fire burning inside me.

HAL

Cheer up ! In the Middle Ages it would have been a fire burning *outside* you.

STEPHEN

I could have welcomed the stake—to stretch my arm into the flame like Cranmer, if only I could kindle it into a torch.

HAL [*Patting his shoulder*]

Dear old Steve, the more you change, the more you are the same.

STEPHEN

Dear old Hal—if you only knew what a relief it is to confess myself to you !

HAL

What fun ! I came to find a priest and you make *me* one. . . . [*Resignedly*] Then I suppose I must marry myself.

STEPHEN [*Eagerly*]

Of course you must. What right has any other man to pretend he can sanctify you and your doings ? The same Holy Ghost is in us all.

HAL

Ha ! So the Holy Ghost comes into the next religion.

STEPHEN

How could there be a religion without it ?

HAL

And is that *all* the salvage from the bankruptcy of the creeds ?

STEPHEN

What more do we want ?

HAL

Well, most people want to survive the grave.

STEPHEN

Absurd ! They can't even manage *this* life—as you used to say.

HAL

Well—do you know ?—since I met Helen I've sometimes fancied there may be a survival of the fittest.

STEPHEN

Fancy *you* saying that ! No, Hal, I'm afraid——

[*The casement is pushed open from without.* MARY TRAME appears—a sweet-faced woman of nearly thirty, holding an armful of chrysanthemums. Her voice is anxious.]

MARY

Is Wilfy with you ?

STEPHEN [*Startled, blinking at the increased light*]

No, dearest, but an old friend. Come in !

MARY [*Not coming, but bowing slightly*]

How do you do ? Sophia says he ran out into the road screaming, but I can't see him. You said you'd keep your eye on him.

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

I haven't much eye to keep.

MARY [*With fresh anxiety—steps in]*
Oh dear, did you put in your drops at eleven ?

STEPHEN
I can't remember.

MARY
Hold these a moment.

[*Gives him the flowers and goes through door l.*]

STEPHEN
Now she's gone to get my eye-drops.

HAL
Seems to keep *her* eye on everything.

STEPHEN
She's a saint. How can I tell her that these chrysanthemums she's dressing up the church with are only a relic of Greek paganism ? [Drops them on table.]

HAL
I suppose she would arise and go unto her father, the converter of cannibals.
[*Looks up at picture of savages in top-hats.*]

STEPHEN
Don't laugh. My poor Mary !

HAL
I'm not laughing. I rather admire the old bishop. It requires some pluck to preach to people who regard you more as a meal than a minister.

STEPHEN

He risks his life, he won't risk his brains. He never thinks.

HAL

I suppose those are the Christian fathers of the Congo.

[*Re-enter MARY L., shaking a phial at her husband.*]

MARY

You shameless sinner ! You haven't used a drop !

STEPHEN [*Introducing*]

Dr. McFadden, son of the famous inventor—Mrs. Trame.

MARY [*Almost ignoring HAL, with a faint bow*]

Sit down, dear ! Your friend will excuse me when he knows that on the best Wiesbaden authority only these drops stand between you and blindness.

HAL

Certainly. Go ahead. [*MARY quietly begins dropping drops along the glass rod into her husband's eyes.*] That's a jolly little boy you've got.

MARY [*Pausing in relief*]

Oh, then he was here just now ?

STEPHEN

Of course, Mary, you're always so nervous.

MARY

Well, with these horrid motorists about !

HAL [*Bowing*]

Thank you.

MARY

I didn't mean——

HAL

No, but I assure you the only person I've ever damaged was myself.

STEPHEN

There's not much trace of that.

HAL

No. Thanks to X-rays. Was unconscious for twenty-four hours, and even now I can't remember the actual smash. It's a death I can recommend.

[*Noise of car returning R.*]

MARY [*Alarmed*]

There's another.

HAL

No, only mine coming back. I must be off.

STEPHEN

Nonsense, stay to lunch.

HAL

No, thank you. [*Goes to window and looks R. Car heard panting.*] There, Mrs. Trame, you can satisfy yourself there is no gore on my wheels.

MARY [*Half hysterically*]
Don't, please.

STEPHEN

Why won't you lunch with us? You're not angry
because I——?

HAL

No, no, I quite feel *with* you——

STEPHEN

Then why——?

MARY [*Purposely interrupting*]

Open a little wider! [STEPHEN dilates his eyes.]

HAL

Good-bye, Mrs. Trame.

MARY

Good-bye. [*Busily dropping drops.*] Excuse my not
shaking hands—you can go out by the window.

HAL

Thank you. So long, Steve! I'll send you an invitation.
[Exit by casement, goes R.]

STEPHEN

You might have pressed him to lunch.

MARY

That brute?

[HAL passes window R.]

STEPHEN

Sh ! He's a fine chap at bottom.

MARY

A man who could joke about Wilfy's blood on his wheels. Besides, he has a sneering, unchristian face.

STEPHEN

You were unchristian not to ask him to lunch.

MARY

I almost wish now I had.

STEPHEN [*Triumphant*]

Ha !

MARY

Because there isn't any . . . [Finishes phial business, straightens herself] except bread and cheese. Cook's ill.

STEPHEN

Ill ? [Car heard driving off R.] You don't mean drunk again ?

MARY

I put her to bed so she shouldn't spoil your harvest sermon. I hope you've thought it out. [Takes up chrysanthemums, goes to casement, stepping out.] As soon as I've found Wilfy and finished in church I'll be ready to type the heads.

STEPHEN

Bother my sermon ! How can I keep my thoughts spiritual with a drunken cook in the house ?

MARY [Turning]

By remembering, dear, that she has an immortal soul.

STEPHEN

Cook immortal ? What is she going to do with her eternity ?

MARY [Surprised and gently reproving]

What are we all going to do with our eternity ?

STEPHEN

I'm sure I don't know.

[Peers half absently into microscope.]

MARY [Shocked]

You don't know ?

STEPHEN

Do you ? . . . Millions and millions and millions of years !

MARY [Disconcerted]

Well, of course, we see but through a glass darkly.

STEPHEN [Peering into microscope]

Quite so. . . . [She steps out again. He murmurs to himself] An eternity to get drunk in !

MARY [*Turning again*]
Did you say anything, dear ?

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]
I ? . . . Oh, how was your old washerwoman ?

MARY
Mrs. Glossop ? Poor thing ! The sooner she's taken the better. But *she* knows how she'll spend eternity—away from the wash-tub.

STEPHEN
That's only a negative idea.

[*Peers again into microscope.*]

MARY
I know—but wasn't it quaint and pathetic ? “ I'll soon be in heaven, mum,” she said, “ where there's no white dresses ! ”

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]
Hardly the conventional heaven.

MARY [*Smiling*]
No ! . . . But don't make yourself blinder, dear, with that miserable—

[ELI OAKSHOTT, *the blacksmith, in his apron and holding a big hammer in his right hand, appears behind her from R. leading WILFRED by his left hand. The blacksmith is a brawny giant, who looks the soul of good nature.*]

OAKSHOTT [*Cheerily*]
Here he be, mum !

MARY [With a cry of joy]

Wilfy !

[Drops the chrysanthemums on a chair and folds him in her arms.]

OAKSHOTT

He will stand too near the forge, mum.

MARY

O Wilfred, I told you——

WILFRED

But I like to watch the sparks.

OAKSHOTT

Ay, it be a glorious sight—always minds me of the souls in hell. But we don't want little boys to burn. Well [Going], God bless you all.

WILFRED [Breaking from his mother and catching the blacksmith round the leg]

No, no, I don't want you to go.

OAKSHOTT

I've got my work, sonny.

WILFRED

Well, let me hold your hammer a moment.

OAKSHOTT [Giving it]

There !

MARY

No, no. It's too heavy. [To blacksmith, reproachfully]

How could you ? [Takes it from child and returns it.]

OAKSHOTT

I can't resist the little 'uns, 'specially when I thinks of what our Lord said about suffering 'em to come to Him. Good-bye, sonny. [*Kisses him and exit to R.*]

MARY

You silly boy, suppose it had dropped on your little toeses.

WILFRED

Toeses, Sophia says, not toeses.

MARY

Toeseses !

[*Catches him up and kisses the tips of his shoes.*]

STEPHEN [*In paternal superiority*]

Well, talk of licking people's shoes !

MARY

You hug your microbes, you old grizzly-growler. You don't deserve to have such a son. [Going.]

STEPHEN

Don't forget the chrysanthemums. [*Picks them up.*]

WILFRED [*Struggling down*]

I'll carry them.

[*Takes them.*]

MARY [*Taking his hand*]

And we must hurry, petsy, or the Squire will be down to see the decorations.

STEPHEN

Old meddler ! He always reminds me of that verse in Genesis—the Lord God walking in the garden. [Sits.]

MARY

Don't be profane, dear—even the Squire has his cross, to bear.

STEPHEN

You mean his gout.

MARY

I mean his wife.

STEPHEN [Smiling]

Poor lachrymose lady ! What will *she* do with her Eternity ? She has to play patience ~~every night~~ to get rid of Time ! And how is the Squire going to be happy in heaven unless the cherubs curtsey ?

MARY

Come along, Wilfy, your father is getting flippant.

[Leads child out.]

STEPHEN [Tragically]

Flippant ! [Lets his head fall in his hands.]

MARY [Turning on the grass and catching up WILFRED and kissing his toes in gay defiance—they make a pretty picture, the boy holding the flowers.]

Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

[STEPHEN raises his head wearily and drops it again. She sings sunnily]

"Let Thy Saints be gathered in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin."
Sing up, Wilfy—wake the sluggard up.

WILFRED }
MARY } [Singing]

"All upon the golden floor
Praising Thee for evermore."

MARY

Join in the harvest hymn, Daddy ! It'll inspire your sermon.

WILFRED }
MARY } [Singing louder.]

"Come with all Thine angels, come——"

STEPHEN [Jumping up]

Mary, I cannot stand it any longer.

MARY [Laughingly]

Do we sing so badly as all that ?

STEPHEN

Those played-out stage properties—Angels, Squalling Saints, Golden Floor !

MARY [Her laughing face growing suddenly frozen and ashen]

Put the flowers by the altar, Wilfy—I'll come in a moment.

[Exit WILFRED by sward R. MARY's eyes on him a few seconds.]

STEPHEN [*To himself*]

Good God! What have I said . . . ? [Falls back into his chair.] My poor Mary!

MARY [*Coming to him*]

My poor Stephen! Have you seen Dr. Rogers lately?

STEPHEN

I saw him in church Sunday evening [*Babbles nervously*], and it fidgeted me. I always expect to see the verger beckon him out to a birth or a—

MARY

You know what I mean. Have you consulted him?

STEPHEN

You think I am ill—mad perhaps.

MARY

I think your nerves are overstrung—you cry out in your sleep—I've been apprehending a breakdown.

STEPHEN

That was why you made me leave my books and dig in the garden?

MARY

That and your eyes.

STEPHEN

Digging made me worse. Every scoop of my spade sliced through a red writhing worm. People prate of

the peace of Nature. Every square inch of Nature is packed with struggle and sorrow. Oh, when I think of these blind wriggling creatures labouring on our soils, bringing the fine mould to the top and making passages for the rains and dews, I feel it is to the worms we should be singing our harvest hymns.

MARY [*Feeling his forehead*]

Yes, yes, how hot your head is !

STEPHEN

You think I am ill because I dare to face life as it is—to see the tears of things !

MARY

It is *because* you are ill that I have acquiesced in your *not facing them*, that I have gone in your place to comfort old Mrs. Glossop on her bed of cancer.

STEPHEN

Comfort her ! Poor old washerwoman ! Sixty years of drudgery, eleven children born in agony and reared on bread and dripping—and now to lie crucified with cancer ! And I have to comfort her by telling her her God took a day off.

MARY [*Appalled*]

Stephen ! What are you saying ?

STEPHEN

A day off the joy of His eternal omnipotence—one single day of suffering—they call it Good Friday.

MARY [*Breathes*]

My God !

STEPHEN

The real Good Friday would be that which gave us the cure for cancer.

MARY

You make my blood run cold.

STEPHEN

Let it run cold. Cold is great, cold is life-giving. Lazzaroni of religion, we have drowsed too long in a tropical theology, that has enervated and unmanned us. We talk as if scrofulous babies dropped from heaven, and poverty and disease were providential opportunities for prayer. But just as the millions who died of yellow fever might have been saved if instead of looking to the skies they had wiped out the mosquito, so we might have cleaned out our swamp of misery and evil centuries ago if we hadn't looked to some gigantic genie in the clouds to do all our dirty work and give us golden floors to squat on into the bargain.

MARY [*With white set face*]

And do you say there is *nobody* in the skies ? .

STEPHEN

I say there is somebody in ourselves. Once wolves howled where now our garden flowers. As our ancestors cleared out the wolves, so we must clear out

every cruel and evil force outside us and within us till all earth becomes a garden.

MARY

Even my father would say "Amen" to that.

STEPHEN

With his lips. But his eyes are fixed on salvation in a world beyond. "One world at a time," say I.

MARY

But we must look to the next, too.

STEPHEN

No ! It's this cloudy belief that everything will be somehow cleaned up in another world that makes us tolerate all these miseries and injustices. Besides, who knows that there *is* a next world ? Where was Hal McFadden after his motor accident—during those twenty-four hours of unconsciousness ? No, let us have the courage to grasp our nettle. Let us recognise that death is death.

MARY [*Dazed*]

Death is death ?

STEPHEN

What else makes its blackness and its beauty, its terror and its tranquillity ? Why else these tears ?

[SOPHIA opens the door R.]

SOPHIA

Please, mum, the choir.

MARY [*Dazed*]

The choir ?

SOPHIA

They be waiting for the organ.

MARY

Oh, the choir-practice ! Yes, yes, say I'll come in a minute. [*Exit SOPHIA.*] Oh, I felt that that McFadden was an evil influence. And you—God's ordained !

STEPHEN

God's ordained ! Oh, if that was true—if I were the man ordained to bring the next religion !

MARY [*Overwhelmed*]

The next religion ?

STEPHEN

Yours was not always in the world—the next must begin some time too.

MARY [*Breaking down in tears*]

O blessed Jesus, help my husband in this his sore trial and temptation !

STEPHEN

Calm yourself, dear—the choir is waiting.

MARY [*Struggling with herself*]

Yes, yes, I am exciting your poor tired brain. Come, darling. [*Tries to lead him to his bedroom L.*] My pet

shall lie down and mummy will take off his horrid glasses.

STEPHEN

Mary, do try and realise I'm neither insane nor an infant. Just as Luther was called to make the religion you now hold, so am I called to make the religion of our children.

MARY

The religion of Wilfred—O my God !

[The organ and choir burst out joyously R.]

CHOIR

“ Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of Harvest Home,” &c. &c.
[The hymn continues as an undercurrent to the conversation.]

STEPHEN

Why, who is playing the organ ?

MARY [Ecstatic]

It must be Wilfy !

STEPHEN

The little rascal !

MARY

The little angel ! That is God's answer to your blasphemy ! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings !

STEPHEN

Yes, indeed. It is Wilfred that has taught *me*.

MARY

You ! Why, you hardly ever take any notice of him.

STEPHEN

It is his childish questionings about God and man—
how shall I answer him ?

MARY

As your father answered *you*.

STEPHEN

Exactly. My father answered me as truly as he knew.
Shall I give answers I know to be false ?

MARY

How do you know they are false ?

STEPHEN

O Mary, do you think I have not agonised to find
them false ? I have been to the bottom of things.

MARY

Are you sure it was the bottom ? You're so short-sighted.

STEPHEN [*Relieved*]

Ah, now you are your old teasing self ! Go to your
choir, dear !

MARY

To my choir ? To tell them they are singing a lie ?
That all this holy peace around us is a mockery ?
[Goes to window.] Look at these stones of the dead
who fell asleep in Christ—will you dare to say their
faith was false ? You may as well question the sunshine
and the sweet grass.

STEPHEN

It is no sweeter than their sleep.

MARY

And they will never wake ?

STEPHEN

We wake in our children. Before Wilfred came, life
did sometimes seem a blind alley leading to a tomb—
now through *his* eyes I look beyond, and crying to
the new generation “God-speed,” I shall be content,
after the heat and burden of the day, to fold my hands
in sleep.

MARY [*Passionately*]

And where is the reward for the heat and burden,
the struggle and the suffering ?

STEPHEN

[The struggle is its own reward, the joy of battle. To
fight for the right is to share God’s work. Do you
want a lubberland of eternal lollipops ?

MARY

I want to be with God.

STEPHEN

You are with God now—or never. We have only our moment of life—let us make it the highest.

MARY

Is that the next religion?

STEPHEN

That is its essence.

MARY

And death ends all?

STEPHEN

Death softens and renews all, as night softens and renews the day . . . You are shivering—I'll shut the window. [Moving to it.]

MARY

No! It is your Arctic religion.

STEPHEN

Its glacial truths will breed a sturdier race than your tropical theology. We can't drug ourselves any longer with the dreams and myths of our fathers. Man rose from the brute, not fell from the angel, and the Holy Ghost that urged him upwards still breathes in us and urges us to heights yet more divine.

MARY [*Passionately*]

Yes, to seek God through Christ.

STEPHEN

We can only seek Him through ourselves.

MARY

But why should we worship a God who ignores us ?

STEPHEN

Why do you worship Beethoven or Bach or lose yourself in a great landscape ? Worship enlarges us. We are like shore-sponges—we may saturate ourselves in the infinite salt-flowing sea around us or be left on the beach dry and gritty and small.

MARY

Your religion is terrible !

STEPHEN

Life is terrible. God is terrible. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth—what religion ever said otherwise ? Your religion is terrible.

MARY

Mine ?

STEPHEN

To those who really believe it. Listen.

[Selects an old folio from the shelves.]

MARY

What book is that ?

STEPHEN

“ St. Fulgentius on the Faith ”—a highly esteemed

work of the sixth century. [Searching for the page.] I will translate the Latin: "We must believe beyond doubt that not only men who are come to the use of reason but infants, whether they die in their mother's womb or after they are born—unless they have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—are punished with everlasting punishment in eternal fire."

MARY

Fulgentius was a fool—an old monk who never had a child. That is not *my* religion.

STEPHEN

But you saw how hurriedly I had to christen Mrs. Mason's baby because it was dying. And even *you* are fearing *I* shall be eternally damned because I am no longer a Christian.

MARY

I will baptize you again with my tears.

STEPHEN

You see! You're just as foolish as Fulgentius. [Takes her hand.] Now do exercise your reason, dear. Because I can't credit a Resurrection about which even the Apostles contradict themselves— •

MARY [Snatching her hand away]

You make me feel—home-sick. [Breaks down in fresh tears.] And I thought this was my home.

[Going out distractedly at casement.]

STEPHEN

Where are you going ?

MARY

I want my Wilfy. The world is falling to pieces around me. I want something solid to hold by.

[*Is outside.*]

STEPHEN

Yes, dear, but dry your eyes.

MARY [*Turning*]

Stephen, if what you say were true, if there is no heaven for old Mrs. Glossop after her life of toil and pain, you ought to hush it up, as we hushed up the suicide of her son in Canada. How are these poor souls to bear it ?

STEPHEN

Those who cannot bear it will not believe it. But you—you will be strong.

MARY

I ?

STEPHEN

You and I together. We will strengthen each other. We will go out and teach the strong.

MARY

Go out ?

STEPHEN

I cannot stay here and eat the bread of hypocrisy.

MARY

Stephen ! Your levity amazes me.

STEPHEN

My levity ?

MARY

What else is it ? You're like a child with a new toy.
You think of nothing but your new religion.

STEPHEN

Why, what else should I think of ?

MARY

Of your parishioners, of your boy, even of me. What
is to become of us ?

STEPHEN

My sheep will get another shepherd. You and I and
Wilfred will live in London—the place of large
thoughts.

MARY

And what shall we live *on* ?

STEPHEN

It is that sordid question of loaves and fishes that
keeps the Church stagnant, infested with gagged
ministers ; who believe as few of the Thirty-Nine
Articles as I do. I will not hear it.

MARY

But you *shall* hear it. You know I can only typewrite.

STEPHEN

I'll find something.

MARY

What thing ?

STEPHEN

Well—er—I can write for the papers.

MARY

With *your* eyes——?

STEPHEN

I can coach.

MARY

There's as much competition in coaching as in typing.

STEPHEN [*Impatiently*]

I will earn our bread.

MARY

By preaching the next religion ?

STEPHEN

God forbid ! The next religion will not petrify itself by a paid priesthood.

MARY

Then you'll earn our bread in the *intervals* of preaching it ?

STEPHEN

I suppose so.

MARY

Really, Stephen, you've no more sense than a baby.
No ! Here we are and here we stay.

STEPHEN [*Piteously*]

You won't go *with* me ?

MARY [*Decisively*]

Nor you without me.

STEPHEN

I must.

MARY

You would leave me ?

STEPHEN

It is you that would leave me. You took me for better
or worse.

MARY

My vows before God's altar cannot bind me to spread
atheism.

STEPHEN [*Passionately*]

It's not atheism.

MARY

St. Paul says : " Be ye not unequally yoked together
with unbelievers." I shall go to my father.

STEPHEN

Just what McFadden predicted.

MARY

McFadden ! I knew he was behind it all. And never a thought of my father—of the pain to him, the harm to his reputation ! Think how he's encouraged and admired you—ever since you were an orphan boy in Christ's Hospital.

STEPHEN

I've thought of everything, Mary. But I can't hurt anybody more than I hurt myself.

MARY

Yes, you do—you hurt *me* more—immeasurably more. [Sobs.]

STEPHEN

O Mary, Mary dear, don't, don't !

MARY

You don't consider me one bit.

STEPHEN

My darling——

MARY

All our lovely home broken up—Wilfy taken from this splendid air to some miserable London street . . . only last week I finished the new altar cloth [Sinks sobbing on cosy corner]. And this cosy corner just fitted up !

STEPHEN

You put your cosy corner before my conscience ?

MARY [Rising]

You've got no conscience. Where's your duty to me
and Wilfred ? Promise me you'll do nothing rash !
[Clings to him.]

STEPHEN

My dearest—— !

MARY

Promise me you'll—— !

SQUIRE ROWLEY [Outside window R.]

Now, you boys—get off that tree !

STEPHEN }
MARY } The Squire !

[Drying her eyes, MARY hurries out door R.]

SQUIRE [Appearing at casement with a great string
of bananas]

You in, Parson ?

[The SQUIRE is a century older than his years : he
wears a white square bowler and corduroy breeches
and sports a great florid face.]

STEPHEN

Yes, Mr. Rowley.

SQUIRE

Then perhaps you'll take these beastly bananas.

STEPHEN

Eh ?

[*Takes them in peering bewilderment.*]

SQUIRE

Can't have *them* in the church. Never heard of such harvest decorations.

STEPHEN

Mrs. Trame thought that as they were sent from the Manor—

SQUIRE

Yes, that's what comes of letting to London stock-brokers. Sheafs of corn the Almighty looks for— flowers, apples, carrots, potatoes, even grapes as long as they're grown here. But bananas ! The Lord wouldn't know His own church.

STEPHEN [*Holding bananas uncertainly*]

But the donors will expect to see them.

SQUIRE

Will they, by Gad ! It was bananas that brought the mosquitoes here.

STEPHEN

Really ?

SQUIRE

Came in the banana boxes. Look at that bite on my arm ! [Rolls up sleeve.] One might as well live in a Catholic country !

[Enter SOPHIA R.]

SOPHIA [*To STEPHEN*]

Please, sir, Farmer Burr be come to see you.

SQUIRE

Be he indeed, the rascallion ! Then I'll go back to the choir-practice. I'll have no truck with atheists.

[*Exit by window and goes R.*]

STEPHEN

Show Farmer Burr in.

[*Organ breaks out in greater volume with the more joyous hymn "We plough the fields and scatter" as MARY replaces WILFRED.*]

SQUIRE [*Turning his head back to STEPHEN*]

Ah ! that's better ! I thought the organ was sounding a bit thin !

[*Disappears. STEPHEN puts bananas on table and closes the window, reducing the hymn to a vague undercurrent. Enter FARMER BURR in his best black clothes, awkwardly holding a high hat. He has an honest face with large doglike eyes.*]

STEPHEN

Good day, Burr. Won't you sit down ?

, BURR [*Disregarding invitation*]

You're surprised to see me, Parson.

STEPHEN

Why ? This isn't church.

BURR

'Tis next door to it—and about as near as Silas Burr will ever get.

STEPHEN

Oh no, the churchyard is still nearer.

BURR

Pooh ! You can't fright *me* with your scarebugs. I'm going to be cremated. That's real ashes to ashes.

STEPHEN

Very sensible.]

BURR

Yes—and dodges your hell, Parson.

STEPHEN

How do you know what my hell is ? You never come to church.

BURR

But I know what Squire's hell is—for he tells me to go there. And yours can't be so different or you'd lose the living.

STEPHEN [*Wincing*]

Have you come to talk about my hell ?

BURR

No offence, Parson—we've all got to live. What

I've come for is to see if you believe in your own sermons.

STEPHEN [*Rather alarmed*]

If I believe—?

BURR

In coals of fire. No, no, not hell *this* time. I want to see if you'll put 'em on my head in a manner of speaking—if you'll plead for me with the Squire.

STEPHEN

Plead for you? What about?

BURR

Yesterday, being Michaelmas Day, danged if his baily didn't give me notice. Me whose faithers have been on the farm before the Rowleys were in the county at all.

STEPHEN

Then surely you've got a lease?

BURR

No. Us had a yearly tenancy, and the longer it ran the more solid it seemed! Oh, it's cruel hard! And the farm and the bit of river with its poplars and ellums all twisted round my heart in a manner of speaking!

STEPHEN

Can't you offer more rent?

BURR

It bain't more rent he wants, it's more religion. Plague-spot he calls me. Which I *am* in a manner of speaking—and proud of it.

STEPHEN

Well, why not keep your pride? There's much better land in the next county.

BURR

I don't want to go to foreign parts, with their new-fangled machines.

STEPHEN

Ha! As conservative in farming as you are radical in religion.

BURR

I bain't conservative—I sold my bees for silver and now my missus will have it that that's what brought all the ill-luck.

STEPHEN

Ah, Mrs. Burr told me your sheep didn't do well.

BURR

Rotted away, half of 'em. And then folk go yowling hymns. When Joanna talks to *me* of Providence, I say "Rot." [Laughs bitterly.] Ha! Ha! Ha!

STEPHEN [*Quietly*]

And yet is there anything more providential than sheep-rot?

BURR

Providential, Parson ?

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

In a manner of speaking. One man's meat is another man's poison, and your sheep's rot is the liver-fluke's riot.

BURR

The liver-fluke ?

STEPHEN

That's the parasite that makes the rot. A tiny, hairy thing I've had under that glass there ! It swims about in your pond and its only chance of life is to wriggle inside the lung of a fresh-water snail.

BURR

What's the snail to do with my sheep ?

STEPHEN

Wait ! If the fluke gets inside the snail's lung it settles down and has a family, and the youngsters move over into the snail's liver. There they live happily many generations till one day they produce a long-tailed filibuster which emigrates out of the snail and swims back into the grass at the edge of the pond. Your poor sheep eats that grass and the canny fluke finds a great colony in its liver—and that's what you call rot.

BURR

And so it is ! All that to kill my sheep ! . . . Then

'tis a devil that runs the world in a manner of speaking
—a great spider devil.

[*The hymn has stopped. The organ begins a little voluntary.*]

STEPHEN [*Rising solemnly*]

Spider or devil, it spins so wonderfully, Farmer Burr,
with all Time for its woof and all Space for its warp—
its web is so boundless, so majestic, so mysterious,
stretched from star to star through the infinities,
that reverence becomes us better than criticism.

[*Organ stops.*]

BURR [*Doggedly*]

Well, *I* call it rot. A sheep has more rights than an
insect.

STEPHEN

Why? God's universe is a democracy. Physically
man himself counts no more than the flea which
infests him with the plague it sucks from rats.

BURR

Then there *bain't* no God's universe.

SQUIRE [*Reappearing*]

That scabby sheep still here?

BURR [*Incensed*]

Plague-spot, if you like, but not—

[*Lifts his clenched fist.*]

SQUIRE

Put down your hand, or, by Gad, I'll have you arrested
for contempt of court.

BURR

This bain't a court.

SQUIRE

But I'm a magistrate !

STEPHEN

This is hardly the way, Farmer, to get concessions.

SQUIRE

He thinks because he can insult the Almighty with impunity, he can defy *me* !

STEPHEN

Don't you think, Mr. Rowley, it would be more Christian to be as patient with him as the Almighty is ? Let him stay on his farm.

SQUIRE

And infect all your flock ?

STEPHEN

Your Christianity might disinfect *him*.

SQUIRE

Fiddlesticks . . . Humph ! Look here, Farmer !

BURR

I'm looking.

SQUIRE

You come to the Harvest Service to-night, and I'll take back my notice.

BURR

I'll see you damned first !

SQUIRE [*To Parson*]

What do you say to that ?

STEPHEN [*Faintly smiling*]

Sounds Christian enough.

SQUIRE [*Deafly*]

Eh ? Not Christian enough ? Humph ! Well, you come to the service and I'll give you a seven years' lease.

BURR

No !

SQUIRE

Fourteen !

BURR

No !

SQUIRE

Twenty-one !

BURR

No !

SQUIRE

Then go to hell !

BURR [*To PARSON*]
What do you say to *that*?

STEPHEN
I say you're a real Christian.

[*Holds out hand.*]

BURR [*Smacks it away*]
I can stand being called a plague-spot, but damned if I'll be called a Christian!

[*Claps on high hat and exit R. by casement.*]

SQUIRE
What do you mean, sir, by calling him a Christian?

STEPHEN
I didn't say a Christian—I said a real Christian, a man who gives up everything for his ideal.

SQUIRE
Ideal? Damn it all, Mr. Parson, if you had talked like that when your father-in-law came a-begging for this living—

STEPHEN [*Amazed and wounded*]
The Bishop of the Soudan—?

SQUIRE
Yes, sir, through my aunt's secretary—the brother of one of his Uganda underlings.

STEPHEN
Uganda is not in the Bishop's diocese—

SQUIRE

Well, Ashanti—what the devil ! At any rate, my aunt
Lady Betty—

MARY [*Screaming outside R.*]

Stop ! [*Sound of a body falling.*] O my God !

[*Noise and babble of a crowd.*]

STEPHEN [*Rushing out through casement*]

Mary ! What's happened to you ?

SQUIRE

That scabby sheep has been butting into her. What
did I tell you ?

MARY [*Outside*]

Stand away—give him air.

STEPHEN [*Outside*]

Get him out of this crowd—bring him inside. Keep
back, please.

[*Two adult members of the choir carry in the
senseless FARMER BURR and place him on the floor.
He is bareheaded and his huge watch hangs out by
its chain. Others of both sexes, including strange
ancient gaffers, gather round, the girls curtseying as
they catch sight of the SQUIRE. WILFRED, gazing
with open eyes at the body, is in foreground.*]

SQUIRE

Farmer Burr !

MARY

The blacksmith felled him with his hammer.

SQUIRE

Good God ! [*Touches FARMER BURR's hair. His fingers get dabbled in blood.*] But this is murder !

MARY

No, no ! I think he's only stunned.

STEPHEN

My wife's shriek unnerved the stroke.

MARY

But it was his hat that saved him. The cut is not deep. That cushion please ! [*STEPHEN brings it from the cosy corner. She places FARMER BURR's head on it and unloosens his collar.*] A glass of water.

[*Somebody runs R. WILFRED produces a tin trumpet and begins blowing.*]

STEPHEN [*Angrily*]

Hush, Wilfred.

WILFRED

I'm playing the Dead March.

MARY [*Sweetly*]

No, no, petsy.

WILFRED

Well, the last trump then—that'll wake him up.

MARY

You little cherub ! You shall run and get daddy's

sticking-plaster. [Exit WILFRED door L. SOPHIA with great eyes of alarm comes by door R. with water, and MARY puts it to BURR's lips, then bathes his wound with her handkerchief. WILFRED returns with plaster.] Thank you, darling. Sophia, my smelling-salts !

[SOPHIA hurries out R. MARY adjusts plaster over the FARMER's cranium.]

SQUIRE [*Fuming*]

But the blacksmith—where's the policeman ? Always somewhere else.

OAKSHOTT [*Stepping forward from background with his hammer as before, but his face fanatically transfigured*]

Oh, I haven't run away. . . . I have bruised the serpent's head, as Genesis commands—I have done the will of God !

STEPHEN [*Furiously*]

Damn your theology !

CROWD

Oh, oh ! Parson swore !

OAKSHOTT [*To STEPHEN*]

I was just bringing back your little lad for the second time when I meets the swine coming out of this window in his Sunday togs and topper. "Oho," says I, joyed and surprised. "So you've been to
60

make your peace with God." "Peace with God," he snorts, "it takes two to make a quarrel and two to make a peace, and t'other party don't exist. If he do, let him prove it by a thunderbolt!"

CROWD [*Horrified*]

Oh!

[*They spurn the prostrate body with their feet.*]

MARY [*Fiercely*]

Stand back, please. [SOPHIA brings smelling-salts.]
Thank you.

[MARY puts them to FARMER BURR's nose.]

OAKSHOTT

And with that he whips out his watch and cries,
"Half-past twelve! I give t'other party——"

BURR [*Opening eyes*]

Joanna! . . . Why, where be I?

MARY

Thank God!

STEPHEN

You're here—in my house.

BURR [*Rubbing his forehead*]

I feel fuzzy . . . Hairy flukes, did you say, in my brain-pan?

OAKSHOTT [*Starting forward with raised hammer*]

You son of Belial!

[*Agitation in crowd.*]

MARY [Springing up]

Back ! [His hammer falls slowly under her gaze.]

BURR [Sitting up]

Ah, I mind me now. [Looks at his dragging watch, and puts it in the fob in the waistband of his trousers.] Eli there thought he was God.

STEPHEN

Yes, Thor with his hammer.

SQUIRE

God can do His own work, Eli Oakshott. Think yourself lucky you've escaped the gallows.

OAKSHOTT

I'd go to the gallows for God any day.

SQUIRE

You'll have to go to gaol for assault *this* day.

BURR [Struggling to his feet]

And what good will that do *me* ? I won't prosecute the village idiot. [BLACKSMITH makes menacing move.] And what else *be* you in a manner of speaking ? There's always summat wanting in a bachelor-man—he's got no troubles so he has to make 'em. Where's my hat ?

AN OLD GAFFER

Here it be !

[Hands forward the high hat, an inglorious wreck, with a great gash in the middle. Titter of crowd.]

BURR [*Surveying it ruefully*]

Holey ! . . . Like the blacksmith's Bible.

SQUIRE

Silence, man ! After Mrs. Trame has——

OAKSHOTT

I wish I'd bashed his brains out.

BURR

You agree with Squire—this bain't no place for a man with brains !

SQUIRE [*To OAKSHOTT*]

You'll buy him a new hat at least.

BURR

I wouldn't *take* his hat. I'll keep this as a trophy of Christian love in a manner of speaking—hand it down to my childer's childer—[*Sticks his finger through it*] to keep it holey. Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

[*Exit, twirling it on his finger.*]

SQUIRE

Get along, you pack of idlers. [*Crowd vanishes with curtseying and pulling of locks.*] Well, blacksmith, what are you waiting for ?

OAKSHOTT

For the handcuffs. I made 'em myself.

SQUIRE

Go back to your forge.

OAKSHOTT

As you please. But I tell you, Squire, every spark I beat out will seem a soul sent to hell through that Satan-serpent.

[*Exit by casement.*]

STEPHEN

Oh, this cursed theology.

[*Exit abruptly into his room.*]

SQUIRE

What's the matter with your husband ?

MARY

He— [*Picks up cushion from floor*] he's been over-working.

SQUIRE

Send him out with the guns. We begin to-morrow on the pheasants and my dogs'll—

MARY

No, no, he can't bear hurting things.

[*Replaces cushion.*]

SQUIRE

Fiddlesticks. What did God Almighty make pheasants for ?

WILFRED

Squire !

[*Pulls his coat.*]

SQUIRE

Yes, my lad.

[*Patting his head.*]

WILFRED

Why won't you be happy in heaven unless the cherubs curtsey ?

SQUIRE [*Reddening*]

Why—what ?

MARY [*Blushing, confused*]

You silly boy. Here—eat a banana. [*Hastily.*] And then you see my husband's eyes are not much use for shooting.

SQUIRE

Well, he wants *something* for his liver. [*Paternally.*] Try squills [*Shakes her hand in genial farewell. At window*] or sarsaparilla. [*Exit.*]

MARY

You naughty boy ! And to go again to that forge ! [*His face gets distorted.*] No, don't cry. My petsy played the organ beautifully. [*Snatches him to her breast.*] Oh, Wilfred, promise me you will *always* say your prayers !

WILFRED [*Munching banana*]

Of course, mummy.

MARY

My sweetest ! Say them now.

WILFRED [*Munching*]

But I said them this morning.

MARY

Then say to-night's prayers.

WILFRED [*Munching*]

But it's morning.

MARY

Oh, say them !

WILFRED [*In a breathless murmur*]

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation ; But deliver us from evil : For Thine is the kingdom, The power and the glory, For ever and ever—

[*Resumes banana.*]

MARY [*Who has followed with her lips, especially emphasising "temptation," ends with him, sobbingly*] Amen !

[*Catches him up and covering him with kisses carries him towards R. door.*]

WILFRED [*In tearful alarm*]

But I'm not going to bed ?

MARY

No, no, pet—but your hair wants brushing. It's like Struwwelpeter's.

WILFRED [*At exit*]

But I won't say 'em again to-night.

[*Exeunt. After a brief pause door l. opens and STEPHEN peeps in. Reassured he lets the door close, then returns somewhat stealthily with a shabby kit-bag, takes a book here and there and throws it in.*]

STEPHEN

Ah, my spare glasses ! [Picks up case from table, then starts as at a creaking door. Again reassured, he throws in a little box.] Paper pins are always useful. [Peers around.] There's my slippers !

[Picks them up under a chair. Re-enter MARY door R.]

MARY

Stephen ! What are you doing ?

STEPHEN [*Disconcerted, slippers in hand*]

I meant to spare you the pain of parting.

MARY

You are going away ?

STEPHEN

I can bear it no longer.

MARY [*Hysterically*]

You don't love me !

STEPHEN

You know it isn't that. You'll have Wilfred to love.
Sell what you like and I'll send you all I can.

MARY

Because the blacksmith struck Farmer Burr ! You
want to pretend that's Christianity !

STEPHEN

It's one sort of Christianity !

MARY

Have *I* ever struck anybody with hammers ?

STEPHEN

Don't be childish. In my heart of hearts I envied the
blacksmith.

MARY

Envied him ?

STEPHEN

Dare *I* strike a blow for God ?

MARY

God forbid ! I'd rather see you struck down like
Farmer Burr.

STEPHEN

Yes, Mary, if I could be struck down *like* him—in
defence of my real belief. [Puts slippers in bag.]
A small farmer and a blacksmith—and they put me
to shame !

MARY

You shall not go.

[*She snatches at the bag.*]

STEPHEN

I follow the Holy Ghost.

MARY

And break your marriage vow.

STEPHEN

No—you break that.

MARY

I ?

STEPHEN

Didn't you quote St. Paul ?

MARY [*Wincing*]

Stephen, do you remember that day in Madrid—
the day you bought me the mantilla ?

STEPHEN

How can I forget our honeymoon ?

MARY

And now I and the child are nothing to you.

STEPHEN

“ Unless a man hateth his father and his mother—— !”

MARY

That's what our Lord said. But you don't believe in Him.

STEPHEN

I do more—I repeat his experience, however humbly.
I see that every reformer must repeat his Passion.

MARY

And what about *my* suffering ?

STEPHEN

It is part of the price.

MARY

The price of what ?

STEPHEN

Of establishing the next religion.

MARY

You establish the next religion ! You can't even pack your bag. Look at it !

STEPHEN

Oh, it'll do.

MARY

One sock ; where's the other ?

STEPHEN

It's there somewhere.

MARY [*Feeling*]

Where? [Pulls out a book.] What do you want with that?

STEPHEN [*Fretfully*]

My *Pilgrim's Progress*! Let it be.

MARY

Pilgrim's Progress! My crochet-patterns. [Throws it out half in laughter, half in tears. Feeling further.] I don't see that sock. [Seriously] Good heavens! Your sponge has sopped your nightshirt. [Brings shirt out.] You can't wear that!

STEPHEN

Yes, I can. [Takes it from her and thrusts it back.] My landlady will dry it.

MARY

And who's *she*?

STEPHEN

How should I know? Somebody in Bloomsbury, I suppose, near the British Museum.

MARY

That's all you're fit for—a museum! [Brings out the tin trumpet.] And that ought to be exhibited, too!

STEPHEN

What's the matter with my shoe-horn?

MARY [*Blows it with a wan smile*]

Wilfred's trumpet. I thought it was for the next religion—to call the faithful together. [*Throws it aside.*] And *here's* the comb I lost last Christmas! I suppose *that's* for the Bloomsbury landlady. I wonder you didn't pack these bananas for her table. And where's your eye-medicine?

STEPHEN [*Sullenly*]

I forgot about that.

MARY

Packs Wilfy's trumpet and forgets his eyes! [*Finds phial on mantel.*] And who'll drop it in? The Bloomsbury landlady? She'll have a pack of more paying lodgers. [*Puts phial in bag.*] You'll be lucky if she doesn't pour it into your soup.

STEPHEN

Don't let us talk of such trifles.

MARY [*Hysterically*]

Trifles!

[*Pulls out wet sponge and goes to window to squeeze it.*]

STEPHEN [*Sullenly*]

After all I did travel before I was married.

MARY

But I hope you travelled with clothes on?

STEPHEN
With clothes ?

MARY
What are you going to wear on the journey ?

STEPHEN
But I've got clothes on.

MARY
Yes, the livery of the last religion. [*He starts and feels his coat.*] Are you going to wear the clothes of hypocrisy ?

STEPHEN
I never thought of that.

MARY
What *have* you thought of ? [*Vicious squeeze of sponge.*] Have you thought of me left alone with an intoxicated cook ?

[*Wrings sponge.*]

STEPHEN [*Embarrassed*]
I—I—

MARY
Have you thought of to-night's congregation waiting for their pastor ? [*Final squeeze of sponge.*] There ! Dry and gritty and small—much better sometimes. [*Packs sponge in bag.*] Have you thought of how

I'm to explain you've eloped with a new religion ?
Even if you're a prophet you can be a gentleman !

[Closes bag with vicious snap and gives it to him.]

STEPHEN [Only half taking it]
But what else can I do ?

MARY

Do ? If you *must* go away, let us do it as St. Paul
teaches—in a seemly and due order.

STEPHEN [Drops bag]
Let *us* do it ? Then you *will* come ?

MARY [With a half-sob]

I took you for better or worse—for wiser or sillier !

STEPHEN

My saint ! My angel !

MARY [Evading his embrace]

Hush ! No played-out theatrical words.

STEPHEN

You give them fresh meaning. [MARY sits down at
table and types rapidly.] What are you typing ?

MARY

The text of your harvest sermon.

STEPHEN [Peering down curiously]

“ That Thou givest them they gather : Thou openest
Thine hand, they are filled with good.”

MARY

Psalm 104. Won't that be a splendid text? Come along now, dictate the heads.

STEPHEN

The heads? [Passes hand wearily over brow.] My head is splitting.

MARY [Half rising]

Oh, poor darling; go in and lie down.

[He moves towards L. As she sees him safely passing through his door she drops into her seat. Click! Click! Click! Click! Click! of typewriter, writing his sermon.]

CURTAIN

Act II

A November morning over two years later. A poorly furnished room over a tobacconist's shop in the Whitechapel Road, giving on a bedroom to the right and on a staircase to the left. In the back wall are two windows, cheaply curtained, with a fireplace in between. The grate is empty and over the mantel are china dogs and a pen and ink. As the curtain rises, a church clock strikes eleven and STEPHEN in shabby lay attire is discovered sitting disconsolately with his head on a dirty table-cloth, still littered with the remains of breakfast. He has grown an untrimmed beard. The typewriter on the floor near door R. is the sole remainder and reminder of the old household goods. There is a knock just before the church bell finishes, of which he takes no notice; it is repeated more loudly, and MRS. BURR, a buxom, rosy-faced woman, looks in with a tray and draws back a little at the sight of him.

STEPHEN

Oh, come in, Mrs. Burr.

MRS. BURR

Excuse me coming up so terrible late, but there's the Monday washing, and half the childer be in bed with colds.

STEPHEN [*Abstracted, rubbing his hands*]

Yes, very cold.

MRS. BURR [*Clearing table*]

My man says as we shall have snow, and London snow, says Silas, be the same colour as London fog. Gracious, but the cold's given you an appetite! Don't want *me* to clear away the breakfast! Not even a lump of sugar.

[*Shows empty basin.*]

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]

Wilfred must have pocketed them when he went to school. I hope Farmer Burr's dyspepsia is better.

MRS. BURR

Oh, it bain't Silas's stomach, bless you, 'tis the man's heart.

STEPHEN

His heart? I thought—

MRS. BURR

Oh, I don't mean the heart as doctors thumps with a telescope: I mean the heart as we can only hear from inside. Silas's heart be a-pining for his farm; he wasn't brought up to sell pipes and 'baccy in a poky Whitechapel shop.

STEPHEN

He *would* come to London.

MRS. BURR

He's not the only donkey.

STEPHEN [*Naively*]

What do you mean?

MRS. BURR

Them as the skin fits can wear it.

[Goes to staircase door, clattering tray.]

STEPHEN [Flushing]

I strongly advised Farmer Burr to take another farm.

MRS. BURR

As if he'd give up being near you ! Calls you Seer
and Master, the loony, and jabbers about hairy flukes
in his liver.

[Opens door.]

STEPHEN

In the sheep's liver, you mean.

MRS. BURR

The sheep or the donkey's, what's the difference ?
First the jackass gets his headpiece cracked for braying
as there bain't no God, now he keeps trumpeting
as God be that gigantic the blacksmith's God be a
baby by comparison. Poor Silas ! That blow on
the brain-pan was the finish of him ! [Exit with
tray. During her momentary absence a few flakes of
snow are seen through the windows ; they very gradually
increase. She returns with a broom and dust-pan.] Ah,
here be the snow. Shan't I light a fire ?

STEPHEN

No, no, it's quite warm. . . .

MRS. BURR

And not a single lump of coal in the scuttle.

[Waving it.]

STEPHEN [*Pretending surprise*]
Isn't there ?

MRS. BURR [*Severely*]

I suppose Master Wilfred pocketed 'em ! [Sets down scuttle with a bang.] Oh, it bain't no use, Parson. It don't need half an eye to see what's happening and I've got four half-eyes. I shall bring up some sausages.

STEPHEN [*Distressed*]

Nonsense ! I forbid you ! Mrs. Trame will be marketing on her way home.

MRS. BURR

Oh, it's bitter hard the way us women be dragged at the heels of our donkeys. There was I, milking my cows and curing my bacon, when smack ! jolt ! off goes the donkey-cart to the New Jerusalem !

BURR [*Outside, below*]

Come down, Joanna ! You'm disturbing the Seer !

MRS. BURR

Nothing of the sort, Silas.

BURR

What be all that jaw about donkeys ?

MRS. BURR

And mayn't I talk about my own husband ?

BURR

Come down ! The Master's got holier things to think about.

MRS. BURR

You mind your pipes and pouches. If you hadn't sold your bees for silver—

[*Bangs door and starts sweeping viciously.*] **STEPHEN** [*Coughing at the dust*]

I'd better go into the bedroom.

[*Exit by door R., stumbling over the typewriter on the floor.*]

MRS. BURR

Seer, indeed ! [Sweeps still more furiously. A knock comes at the door.] Be that Silas ?

ANDREWS [*Outside*]

No !

MRS. BURR

Then come in !

[Enter distractedly ANDREWS, a young man with an earnest intelligent face. There are a few flakes of snow on his neat black overcoat.]

ANDREWS

I want to see the Master.

MRS. BURR

Here's another of 'em ! Excuse me, sir, did any one hit you with a hammer ?

ANDREWS

Worse.

MRS. BURR

I thought so.

[*Sweeps viciously.*]

ANDREWS [*Brushing off the few flakes*]

I'm Wilfred Trame's teacher at the Board School
—at least I was.

STEPHEN [*Reappearing at bedroom door, surprised*]

Do I hear Andrews ?

ANDREWS

Yes, Master !

STEPHEN

In school hours ?

ANDREWS

I'm dismissed.

STEPHEN

Dismissed ?

ANDREWS

A month's salary in lieu of notice.

STEPHEN

My poor boy ! Not because of— ? [ANDREWS nods.] •

Oh, I'm sorry. You shouldn't have—

ANDREWS

I had to, Master. The Holy Ghost wouldn't let me rot in cowardice and lying. There isn't a teacher at the school—no, not the Headmaster himself—who believes in the Fall of Man, and every single one I've lent your book to agrees that the Rise of Man is a far better religion. But they all lie low, and I'm left as the black sheep.

STEPHEN [*With clenched fist*]

Oh, it is scandalous the way untruth—[Enter MARY in bonnet as from street, her cloak just spotted with snow.] Oh, Mary, do you hear this? Andrews has been—Why you're all snowy!

MARY [*Brushing her cloak with her hand*]

It's nothing, it's only just started. What has happened?

STEPHEN

Andrews has been dismissed by people of *your* religion for professing *mine*.

MARY [*To ANDREWS*]

But surely under the Code you have liberty of conscience.

ANDREWS

The School Managers pretended I fought in Victoria Park.

MARY

And didn't you?

STEPHEN

It was to save me from the hooligans who were guying my open-air preaching. He got a black eye.

MARY

Well, liberty to get a black eye hardly suits a school teacher.

STEPHEN

You defend them! Don't you see that it is all one great conspiracy to bolster up their creed, a remorseless use of every social weapon to stifle—

[*Chokes with rage.*]

MRS. BURR [*Who since MARY's entrance has been sweeping unobtrusively at back*]

Don't you stifle, Parson.

STEPHEN

Oh, it's too dreadful. [*To ANDREWS*] And all because you were so kind to Wilfred that I sent you my book.

ANDREWS

Don't worry about *me*, Master. Don't you always say that suffering is the price of truth? Well, I'm glad to pay my share.

MARY

And your wife and child—are *they* glad to pay? [*ANDREWS hangs his head.*] Why did you marry if you wanted to fight the world?

[*STEPHEN buries his face in his hands.*]

MRS. BURR

Ay, that's what I tell *my* zany.

[*Exit angrily with broom and dust-pan.*]

MARY [*To ANDREWS*]

But if you promised not to attend open-air meetings?

ANDREWS

They'd find some other excuse. You don't know these Christians.

MARY

I am one.

ANDREWS

Yes, one in a thousand. Oh, Master . . . ! [STEPHEN does not raise his head. *To MARY*] Tell the Master we'll struggle through. We've got a month to look round.

[*Abrupt exit.*]

STEPHEN [*Groaning*]

My one follower.

MARY

No, dear, there's Farmer Burr.

STEPHEN

I don't count *him*. The ground was ready. The old religion was weeded out. After two years' work—one follower.

MARY

Yes, dear, but two eyes still—and I've been so afraid—

STEPHEN

I know I've that to be thankful for—but only to you.
If I had had to write out my book—

MARY [Smiling]

Then not even the printers could have understood a word of "The Next Religion."

STEPHEN

Laugh at me as you like—I shall never forget your goodness in typing what you disapproved of—

MARY

It's not the only book I've typed that I disapprove of.
The trouble is I can't get more to disapprove of.

[*Drops dejectedly into a chair.*]

STEPHEN

What ! They didn't give you that socialist novel after all !

MARY

I oughtn't to have stood out on Saturday for sixpence a thousand ; the moment I left it was snapped up at fivepence halfpenny.

STEPHEN

How horrible ! The labour market is a jungle of wild beasts.

MARY

I've often explained to you, dear, that typing is a job poor gentlewomen can do in their spare time. I've been a blackleg myself. [Rises.]

STEPHEN

Where are you going ?

MARY

I must pawn this cloak.

STEPHEN [*Horrified*]

With winter on us ?

MARY

What else is left ? Wilfy must find *something* to eat when he comes home from that horrid school. I was hoping the second post would have brought you the publisher's account. There's the typewriter—but we must keep that to the last. [*Feels cloak.*] Yes, this cloak will cover a multitude of meals.

STEPHEN

No ! No !

MARY [*With forced smile*]

What do *you* know of pawnbrokers' prices ? Why, we shall gorge on this for days—like great moths. I only wish I had pledged it last week instead of the mantilla.

STEPHEN

I'm glad you didn't.

MARY [*Coming to him and stroking his face*]

Silly Stephen ! Growing a beard hasn't made you any wiser. Will you never understand that the

mantilla you gave me on our honeymoon warms me more than all the cloaks in— Your teeth are chattering—let me wrap it round *you*.

STEPHEN

No ! [Fending her off] I am aflame—afame with anger against the world—publisher, public, and reviewers alike.

MARY

There were fifteen thousand books published last year, dear, in England alone.

STEPHEN

I doubt if there were fifteen—real books I mean. But I was blind and foolish to use up our money in paying the publisher to publish mine—why did you let me ?

MARY

You would have gone melancholy mad if I hadn't. But there *must* be *some* sales.

STEPHEN

If only I could get the account out of the publisher ; even my threats of legal proceedings produce, you see, no reply.

[*A knock at the door.*]

MARY

Come in !

[Enter FARMER BURR with a letter.]

BURR

An express letter, Master ! I signed for it.

STEPHEN [*Taking it*]

Thank you ! My publisher !!

[*Opening it.*]

MARY [*Smiling joyously*]

Talk of the devil !

BURR

Excuse me not bringing it up on a tea-tray, but
Joanna's in a tantrum.

MARY [*Her eyes eagerly on the letter*]

What has the tantrum to do with the tray ?

BURR

Well, the trays be in the kitchen, and so be Joanna.
She's frying sausages like Old Scratch—in a manner of
speaking. Any answer, Master ?

STEPHEN [*With ecstatic face*]

No, thank you. Mary, read this !

[*Exit FARMER BURR.*]

MARY [*Reading*]

“ John Skewton, in account with Stephen Trame, Esq.
‘ The Next Religion.’ Printed 1000 cop—”

STEPHEN [*Eagerly interrupting*]

And none left !! Truth will out, even in England.

MARY [*Reading*]

“ Reviewers’ copies, 71, author’s copies 6, Royalty on
923 copies at 1s. a copy, 13 taken as 12, £42. 12s.”

STEPHEN [*Rapturously*]

Oh, Mary ! [Takes her hand] We are saved !

MARY [*Reading on dryly*]

"Accounts payable six months after statement."

STEPHEN

What ! [Peers at paper.] Oh, but this is absurd ! I'll go to him at once—he'll surely advance me five pounds out of the hundreds I paid him.

MARY

But you can't walk in this weather. Telephone to him from the post office.

STEPHEN

What a good idea ! . . . [Feeling in pockets.] Have you got twopence ?

MARY

Not a farthing.

STEPHEN

Well, I don't mind borrowing of Farmer Burr now.

[Throws open door.]

MARY

Wait ! Your scarf !

[Gets it and wraps it round his throat.]

STEPHEN

Courage, Mary !

[Exit excitedly, forgetting to close door.]

MARY

Courage ? [Falls into a chair.] When only the success of an anti-Christian book stands between us and starvation. O God !

[Repressing a sob, she rises, takes off her bonnet, and lifts the typewriter strainingly on to the table. The sound of WILFRED's laughter turns her head towards the open door in surprise.]

WILFRED [From below]

Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Caught you, Farmer Burr !

BURR [Below]

No, no, Master Wilfred—put down that snowball ! You'll smash the clay pipes.

[A little clatter of smashing pipes is duly heard.]

WILFRED [Below]

Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! You can send daddy the bill. [He is heard running merrily up the stairs and bursts in, an impetuous schoolboy, far better dressed than his parents, with a smart new overcoat spotted with snow, satchel on shoulder.] Isn't it jolly, the snow ? Why, where's daddy ?

MARY

Just gone out, dear. How is it you're so early ?

WILFRED

Bonynose—I mean the Headmaster—dismissed our class ; we had a new teacher, a smug who couldn't keep discipline. We all want Boggles back.

[Throws off satchel.]

MARY
Boggles ?

WILFRED [*With lofty superiority*]
You call him Andrews.

[*Unbuttons overcoat.*]

MARY
No, don't take that off—unless it's wet. [*Brushes off the dry snow.*] You'll catch cold.

WILFRED
What ! No fire ?

MARY
We've been out.

WILFRED
I call it beastly. And that piano of ours is a jolly long time mending ; really there's nothing for a fellow to come home *for*.

MARY
I wish, dear, you wouldn't use those common words.

WILFRED
Well, not even daddy to talk to—it does give a chap the 'ump.

MARY
Hump, dear. You drop the "h," and I wish you'd drop the "u, m, p," too.

WILFRED

Well, Bonynose drops his h's—“'Old out your 'and,” he screams.

MARY [*Alarmed*]

The Headmaster has not been caning you again?

WILFRED

I *don't* think. Why, he lets me play the harmonium for the hymns. Will the grub be ready soon?

MARY

Well, you see you're so early, dear. [*Lifts his chin.*] Why, you've cut your lip! [*He jerks his head away.*] You've been fighting!

WILFRED

Well, I can't let the chaps say Boggles got the sack through daddy's dirty books.

[*A knock at the door.*]

MARY

Yes?

[MRS. BURR *appears at door with dish of fried sausages.*]

MRS. BURR [*Advancing apologetically*]

Seeing the young gentleman come home before the meal was ready, I thought as a few sausages—

MARY [*Taken aback*]

It's very kind of you, Mrs. Burr, but—

WILFRED [*Alarmed, pulling her dress*]

Oh, but sausages are scrumptious.

[**FARMER BURR** *rushes in excitedly and nearly over-turns the dish.*]

MRS. BURR [*Angrily*]

Gawkim !

BURR [*Ignoring her*]

There's a blooming Bishop to see you !

MARY

A blooming——?

BURR

Excuse my language, but 'tis as weak as I can make it
when I see blackbeetles in gaiters.

MARY [*Faintly smiling*]

Well, you might have said a blessed Bishop.

BURR

Not when I see sanctimonious side-whiskers riding in
carriages.

MARY

Side-whiskers ?

BURR

And a mothers' meeting kind of old lady with a face
like a harvest moon.

MARY [*Dazed*]

It can't be my . . . Mrs. Burr, do you mind giving Master Wilfred the sausages in the kitchen ?

WILFRED

But I want to see the side-whiskers.

MRS. BURR [*Taking WILFRED by one hand and holding the dish in the other*]

Well, it's side-whiskers or sausages—you can't have both.

WILFRED

I did have whiskers once in a sausage.

MRS. BURR [*Leading him out*]

A London sausage, I'll go bail. [*Fiercely*] Silas ! You're leaving the shop unguarded !

[*Exit with WILFRED.*]

BURR [*Humorously*]

Good heavens ! And a Bishop about ! Shall I send the blessed blackbeetle up ?

MARY

Yes, but not rudely, please—you must call him " my lord."

BURR [*Jocosely*]

My lord !

[*Exit*]

[MARY hurriedly tidies STEPHEN's papers, takes WILFRED's satchel off chair and puts it in bedroom.]

A knock at the door.]

MARY

Come in !

[Enter the BISHOP OF THE SOUDAN, a stern sun-bronzed ecclesiastic, imposing in episcopal costume, with grey side-whiskers, and with earnest eyes that redeem the narrow fanatical forehead. With him is his wife, MRS. MALLING, a stout comfortable old lady with a tawny round face. MARY advances half incredulously to meet them.]

Father ! Mother ! You in England !

[Goes towards them.]

BISHOP

And you in Whitechapel ! [Fends her off.] No Judas kisses ! First tell me, are you still a Christian ?

MARY

Because I'm in Whitechapel ?

BISHOP [*Angrily*]

She prevaricates !

MRS. MALLING

Now, now, petsicums, you promised not to bang the tom-tom.

BISHOP [*More angrily*]

Who is banging the tom-tom ? I only ask if——

MRS. MALLING

The idea of Mary being a heathen ! How are you dear ? [Kisses her.] And how is little Wilfred ?

MARY

Wilfred is quite big now. He's in the—the dining-room. When did you get back from Africa ?

MRS. MALLING

Friday.—And how delightful to see snow after the glare and the mosquitoes !

BISHOP [*In sincere reproof*]

Always forgetting, Claribel, the joy of salvation.

MRS. MALLING

You see the Christians, *I* see the crocodiles.

MARY

Has father been making many Christians ?

MRS. MALLING

Yes, and braving many crocodiles. While his clergy were snoring through the hot season, he went up a backwater of the Niger into unexplored cannibal country, all alone.

MARY

That's like my father !

[She goes and takes his hand, he strokes hers half unconsciously.]

MRS. MALLING

Yes, he has practically won a new territory for Christ and the British flag.

BISHOP

Under Providence. Not that I *meant* to enlarge our Empire.

MRS. MALLING

Nor your liver. But you've done both, I'm afraid.

BISHOP

We are in the Lord's hands.

MRS. MALLING

Stuff and nonsense. If you had worn your cholera-belt and changed your wet socks—

MARY

But he's looking all right.

MRS. MALLING

Yes, after the sea-voyage. If we can only stay here ! Luckily they're thinking of making him a home Bishop. That was why we hurried back.

BISHOP

Pardon me, Claribel. That was why *you* hurried back. It's Stephen's and Mary's souls that drew me. [Releases MARY's hands as with stern remembrance.] Mary, some two years ago you wrote me you were leaving Dymthorpe. Your husband was going into journalism and literature.

MARY

Yes.

BISHOP

Pained as I was to think of his giving up the Lord's work—

MRS. MALLING

We thought he might be bettering himself. [BISHOP glares.] Well, the living *was* very poor.

BISHOP

But now—what do I find ? Scandal, deceit, godlessness— !

MRS. MALLING

Impecuniosity ! !

BISHOP

Blasphemy ! ! !

[*Produces book.*]

MARY

Stephen's book ? Who sent you that ?

BISHOP

My publisher—John Skewton.

MARY

John Skewton ? Did he publish *your* sermons, too ?

BISHOP

Handsomely.

MARY

How much did you pay him ?

BISHOP

Eh ?

MRS. MALLING

Handsomely, Mary. Handsomely.

BISHOP

We are not talking of sermons but of Stephen ! *My* son-in-law ! What a tit-bit for the Free-thinkers to get hold of— !

MRS. MALLING

Or his rivals for the home bishopric !

BISHOP

Only this morning Canon Jenkins, who is a School Manager in Whitechapel, told me they had sacked a teacher for circulating a filthy book by an unfrocked clergyman, called Trame. Fortunately he did not remember a daughter of mine had married a Trame.

MRS. MALLING

Yes, it's lucky we had *ten* daughters.

BISHOP

I rushed off to John Skewton—it was from him I got your address—and besought him to suppress the book, the nature of which he could not have realised. But that wouldn't be fair to the author, he said, and with an obduracy that I did not expect in a Churchman and a subscriber to missions, he insisted I must buy up the edition.

MARY

So it was *you* who bought it up ! What for ?

BISHOP

For a bonfire, of course.

MARY

Oh no, no—is *that* fair to the author ? You must not—you shall not—

BISHOP

Surely a bonfire of books is better than a bonfire of souls—

MRS. MALLING

And its getting into the hands of his rivals.

MARY

But this book—it is written with his heart's blood.

BISHOP

So, according to tradition, are all contracts with the Evil One.

MARY

You don't understand. It is his life.

BISHOP

You mean his damnation.

MARY

No, no. Full of heresies as it is, even blasphemies if
100

you will, it is also full of noble thoughts. Christ will yet redeem him.

BISHOP

Then you still believe ! Thank God !

MARY

Yes, I believe. But my husband too believes, though it is in some strange glacial God whose love cannot overcome His law ; believes, though his belief is a sword between his soul and mine ; believes, though he is a voice crying in the wilderness. Oh, father, you are a brave man, who have never valued your life when there were souls to be saved, cannot you respect another brave man, who dares to preach here amid street-hooligans as you among savages ?

BISHOP

Respect an atheist ?

MARY

He is *not* an atheist !

BISHOP

A man who mocks at my Master !

MARY

He does *not* mock at our Master.

BISHOP

On every page.
for

MARY

Not in a single line.

BISHOP

You've *read* this blasphemy ?

MARY

I *wrote* it !

BISHOP [*Overwhelmed*]

You wrote it !!

MARY

On this typewriter.

BISHOP

On this—— !

[*Seizes it as if to dash it down.*]

MRS. MALLING

Now, petsicums, that's delicate.

BISHOP

I—I— [*Takes book frenziedly.*] Where is your fire ?

Why haven't you a fire ?

MARY

Because of Stephen's belief—he goes cold and hungry ;
soon he will have no place to lay his head.

MRS. MALLING

Oh, Mary, you must come to *us*. We're in our old
rooms off Piccadilly.

BISHOP

Not with that man !

MARY

I will not come without him.

BISHOP

But how can I harbour him ? Think of the scandal.

MARY

How can I leave him ? He is my husband.

BISHOP

St. Paul says " Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

MARY

St. Paul says : " But the greatest of these is Charity." His eyes are failing—who will look after him ?

MRS. MALLING

Oh, poor Stephen !

BISHOP

Let him throw himself upon the Bosom that bled for him—let him recant his blasphemies.

MARY

They are too new. You must give him time.

BISHOP

Then do you expect me, a Bishop, to consort publicly with sinners ?

MARY

Your Master did.

BISHOP

My Master said : "I came not to send peace but a sword." We are here to fight Satan not to feed him.

MARY

Who asks for your food ? I'd sooner starve. Oh, I hadn't realised what *your* sort of Christianity—

[STEPHEN abruptly opens door and enters—his scarf has worked up uncouthly round his neck.]

STEPHEN

My poor Mary ! The publisher is in Paris.

MARY

He's a liar. My father saw him this morning.

STEPHEN [*Amazed*]

Your father ? [Peering.] Oh, ah, ah—I wondered at the carriage ! . . . How do you do ?

[Extends hand.]

BISHOP [*Ignoring it and producing book*]

What have you to say for yourself, sir ?

MRS. MALLING [*Seizing and shaking STEPHEN's hand*]

There ! Don't get angry, Stephen !

BISHOP

Don't call him by his Christian name. He has dis-honoured it—and us.

STEPHEN

Ah, so *that's* what's brought you.

BISHOP

Yes, sir, *that's* what's brought us. [*Thumps the book.*] “The Next Religion,” forsooth ! You, the nurseling of Christ’s Hospital, the pet pupil, have the blasphemous audacity to teach the next religion.

STEPHEN

And pray, my lord, what are *you* teaching in Africa ?

BISHOP

The Gospel, sir, of course.

STEPHEN

Well, isn’t *that* the next religion—in Africa ?

BISHOP

I sincerely hope so—though these miserable Mohammedan missionaries are fighting every inch of the ground. And they got in a thousand years ahead of—

MARY

You miss Stephen’s point, father. He means why should he not missionarise here as you do in Africa ?

BISHOP

What ! Are we savages ?

STEPHEN

Yes, my lord ! Precisely what you are in *my* eyes. As sunk in superstitions, in fetishes and taboos as the blackest African.

BISHOP [*Smiling loftily*]

At least we're not cannibals.

STEPHEN

Not in the flesh—I'm not so sure as to the spirit.

MARY

This is nonsense, Stephen. Let me fix your scarf.

STEPHEN

I'm too hot. [*Pulls it off and throws it down.*] Your father ought to know that the cannibals of his diocese only eat human flesh to acquire the virtues of the victim ; it's not a mere meal, it's a sacrament—as solemn to them as—

MARY

Oh hush, Stephen !

BISHOP

You dare suggest— !

STEPHEN

Your own black proselyte, the Director of the Niger Delta Mission, confessed at the Congress of Races here in London how uneasy he feels when he has to say to converted cannibals : “ Take, eat, this is My body ! ”

BISHOP

Tell that to the Roman idolaters—you know very well
that *our* Twenty-Eighth Article—

STEPHEN

Yes, Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

BISHOP

Oh, this is too horrible. While we sweat and fever in
the tropics to wrestle with Islam and iniquity, infidelity
ramps and rages at home.

MARY

Then why don't you stay at *home*, father ?

MRS. MALLING

That's what *I* say, Mary—cholera, crocodiles, white
ants— [Grumbles on.]

BISHOP

There are three hundred millions in Africa, Mary,
perishing for want of light. Three hundred millions.
The number weighs on me as I go to sleep, and when
I open my eyes, my lips murmur, “Three hundred
millions.”

MARY

Well, father, three millions is more than any *one* man
can convert—and that number of heathens you'll find
easily enough in England. The sights one sees in
Whitechapel alone !

STEPHEN
Or Piccadilly.

BISHOP

I know, Mary, that the devil does not neglect England. It is thoughts like these, Claribel, that reconcile me to the home bishopric. But wherever the Lord calls His servant I will go.

MRS. MALLING

Well, I hope the Lord will call you where *I* can get servants.

MARY

Servants, mother? With all those millions of tame natives?

MRS. MALLING

Your father won't have one in the house.

BISHOP

Don't make me out a tyrant! You know they're all thieves and liars.

MRS. MALLING

Yes, I don't know which are worse—the Christians or the crocodiles.

STEPHEN

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

BISHOP [*In dignified rebuke*]

To me, sir, that seems a *sad* state of things.

STEPHEN

And to me, my lord, a *mad* one. You make millions of Christians and they're all thieves and liars.

BISHOP

We—we—we can't raise them in one generation.

STEPHEN [*Vehemently*]

No, but we can lower them. That's what we *do*. Destroy all their race-pride and traditions and local loyalties and moral standards, corrupt their physique with gin and their innocence with clothes, and teach them to call the whole past of their people "debbil-debbil."

BISHOP

It *is* debbil-debbil—and our Lord died to save them from it.

STEPHEN

Well, it has taken nineteen hundred years for the news to reach them.

BISHOP

The more reason then we should speed up salvation.

MARY

Father, you don't mean that all the generations in between were lost!

BISHOP

If they were saved, where would be the need of *us*?

STEPHEN

Hear, hear !

MARY

But how *could* they believe ? They were ignorant !

BISHOP

Ignorance is no excuse.

STEPHEN

It is the only one I can allow *you*. And for spreading such libels on the universe you are the hero of the collecting-box. And every cottage home in England has its little bookshelf stuffed full of you and your likes. The grotesque vanity of it ! These village brains exporting their narrow creed to save the world.

BISHOP

Come, Claribel. Ephraim is joined to idols.

MRS. MALLING

But I want to see Wilfred.

BISHOP

Let them alone, I say. They are dead to us.

MRS. MALLING

Don't be silly, petsicums.

BISHOP [*Thunderously*]

Woman, hold your peace !

MRS. MALLING

Now he's going up the Niger. Nobody can hold him now. I'll come to-morrow.

BISHOP

You will *not* come to-morrow.

MRS. MALLING

Don't bang your tom-toms at *me*.

BISHOP

I forbid it !

[*Opens door.*]

MARY

Go, mother, and I won't let you in to-morrow. You shan't quarrel on my account.

BISHOP

I'm *not* quarrelling. I'm commanding.

MRS. MALLING

Hoity-toity ! I'm not your chaplain. I wish I hadn't ordered my Court gown !

BISHOP

You mean you won't go with me to my sovereign ?

MRS. MALLING

I mean I could have sent Mary a cheque.

BISHOP { [Speaking] } You shall do nothing of—
STEPHEN { *all* } We are not beggars—
MARY { *together*] } Oh no, mother, you—
[FARMER BURR appears at the open door. He carries
a hat-box.]

BURR [Respectfully]
My lord !

BISHOP
What's this ?

BURR [Coming forward]
I've brought your lordship a trophy of Christian love.

BISHOP [Taking it wonderingly]
A trophy of Christian love ?

BURR
In a manner of speaking.

BISHOP [Drawing out the battered high hat, grows pale
with passion]
What do you mean, sir ? How dare you !
[Dashes hat on ground.]

MARY [Reproachfully]
Farmer Burr !

BURR [Picking up hat, sticking his finger in hole and
twisting it round]
Holey ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

BISHOP [*Bashing in hat-box with his foot*]
Claribel, if you had come at once, I should not have
had to keep this command over my temper.

[*Drags her out and bangs door.*]

BURR [*Twirling hat*]
Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

MARY

Hush, Mr. Burr, I told you not to be rude. That was
my father.

BURR [*Suddenly frozen*]

Well, I'm—blest ! [Recovering.] But you can't deny
this be a trophy of Christian love.

MARY

I do deny it—the blacksmith was a religious maniac.

BURR

That's what *I* tell him.

STEPHEN [*Puzzled*]

You *tell* him ?

BURR

In my letters. [Picks up and straightens out the hat-box.]

MARY

You *write* to Eli Oakshott ? Why ?

BURR

To convert him, of course. I sent him "The Next
Religion."

MARY

You know you'll never convert him and you are very silly to provoke him.

STEPHEN

And it certainly won't conduce to his conversion to call him a maniac.

BURR

I'm sorry, Master. [*Puts hat in box.*] But I did reckon your book would take the flukes out of his brain, in a manner of speaking.

MARY

Nonsense, Farmer Burr, you will only scandalise the village. I hope he doesn't answer you according to your folly.

BURR [*Meekly*]

No, ma'am. Nothing but silly texts like "Flee from the wrath to come" and "They shall lick the dust like a serpent," all written in red ink.

MARY

Let sleeping dogs lie. And throw that hat into the dustbin.

BURR [*Outraged*]

Into the dustbin, ma'am ?

MARY

That's all it's fit for.

BURR

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. But this hat be a martyr's crown in a manner of speaking—a sign and symbol of persecution.

STEPHEN

The very reason for the dustbin. Let the *old* religions brood over the past—the next looks to the future.

BURR

I see, Master. Then I'll give it to your boy for a cockshy. 'Twill save my pipes.

MARY

Ah yes, he broke some, didn't he? Put it down to our account.

BURR

Oh, 'twas only two churchwardens crossed. Look on the smashed cross as a sign and symbol of Christianity and I can rejoice in the lad's being one of us—in a manner of speaking.

MARY

Oh no! no! You must not say such things. And never, please, do anything to upset Master Wilfred's faith.

BURR

Never fear, ma'am, 'tis for his faither to do that.

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]

Your shop must be wanting you, surely.

BURR

Yes, Master. [*Takes out little notebook.*] Then I'll mark you down thrappence for the pipes and your lad can stick the pieces in a snow-man's mouth with this old goss [*taps box*] on top !

MARY

Thank you—and how much do we owe you altogether ?

BURR [*Putting book away hurriedly*]

Oh, it bain't the price of a pedigree bull !

MARY

But I'm sure you're needing it. I never see many customers in the shop.

BURR [*Shifting hat-box uneasily*]

Lots come in for a light.

MARY

That's not business.

BURR

It sometimes leads to it—when Joanna's around.

MARY

Well, may I ask how much you've taken this morning ?

BURR

I—I— [*Twirls hat-box*] I've sold two pipes.

MARY

Yes—as we've sold a thousand books. I'm afraid your little savings won't last much longer.

BURR

Oh well, the rent bain't due till Christmas. And we've got to go anyway then.

MARY

Go ?

BURR

Oh, I didn't mean to blab—my tongue wants a sheep-dog. [*Looks anxiously at STEPHEN.*]

STEPHEN [*Raising his head*]

You've got to go ?

BURR

Well, you see, Master, it's the big 'baccy firm, Sampson and Steinberg, that stocks thousands of these here little shops on spec, and I'm only the agent in a manner of speaking. And they say I've got to run a 'baccy-shop not a book-shop.

STEPHEN [*Puzzled*]

A book-shop ?

MARY

You mean you *will* display my husband's book in your window.

BURR

It's my big placard they object to most—"A Religion Without Smoke." You see, ma'am, that blooming Canon Jenkins—I mean that blessed Canon Jenkins—went to them and complained I was spreading the gospel of antichrist.

MARY

But aren't Sampson and Steinberg Jews?

BURR

In a manner of speaking.

MARY

Well, but Jews don't worship Christ.

BURR

No, ma'am, but they worships Christians.

STEPHEN

But why didn't you promise to remove the book and the placard?

BURR

Oh, Master!

[Exit in silent dignity.]

MARY

Now you've ruined *him* too!

STEPHEN

He was pining to get back to the land, Mrs. Burr says.

MARY

But what land has he to get back to ? Unless you mean his grave.

STEPHEN

He'd be happier as a shepherd.

MARY

His only happiness is to be near you. You've hypnotised what little brain he has. [*The windows shake in the swelling storm and snowflakes drive past quickly.*] Oh, but what am I babbling about when winter is howling at the door ? What is to become of us all ? Even our chance of sponging on these poor people will be over at Christmas. [She goes to the door.]

STEPHEN [*Springing up*]

You can't go out in this storm.

MARY

You can't be without food.

[*Turns door-handle.*]

STEPHEN [*Catching hold of her cloak*]

You shan't pawn it—you and the boy must go to your father.

MARY

How *can* I—after defying him ?

STEPHEN

I defied him—not you !

MARY

Before you came—we had a scene.

STEPHEN

You defended me ?

MARY

Of course not. But I couldn't have him call you an atheist.

STEPHEN

Dear Mary—[*Takes her hand*]—you are broadening.

MARY [*Snatching her hand away*]

No, I am not. It's father that must have narrowed—cut off from civilised thought. He is a hero and I respect him—but I couldn't live with him.

STEPHEN

Well, *some* of your sisters live in England.

MARY

Only the two who are married to curates—and they've both got large families.

STEPHEN

But you could take your typewriter with you—work *must* turn up.

MARY

Every meal would be spiced with sniffs at my godless spouse—their food would choke me. Besides, what would become of *you*?

STEPHEN

I shall manage.

MARY

So you said when you dragged us from Dymthorpe.

STEPHEN

There are forty-two pounds twelve.

MARY

In six months—or six centuries.

STEPHEN

In either case I shall be all right.

MARY

I have no patience with you. One would think you believed in a Providence after all.

STEPHEN

I believe in my book. All those thousand seeds flowering!

MARY

Those thousand seeds! Oh, my poor Stephen—flaring not flowering.

STEPHEN [*Dazed*]
Flaring ?

MARY

Like stubble—it was father who bought them up to make a bonfire.

STEPHEN [*Tragically*]

What ! [Pulls out publisher's account.]

MARY

He told me so. Father never lies.

STEPHEN

But this is worse than lying—it is criminal.

MARY

Surely the purchaser of a book can do what he likes with it.

STEPHEN

No he can't. He dare not destroy my work.

MARY

There's always the copy in the British Museum.

STEPHEN [*Eagerly*]

Yes, and at Oxford and Cambridge ! And there were seven copies sold on the day of publication—don't you remember ? Your father couldn't have bought those.

MARY

No, but in all probability Farmer Burr did.

STEPHEN

An auspicious omen ! It's the farmer that plants the seeds.

MARY

He isn't a farmer, he's a tobacconist—it'll end in smoke—that's the real omen—the smoke of the bonfire.

STEPHEN

No ! ! Seven seeds are saved from the burning. They will take root, they will germinate. Do you realise, Mary, the power of a little seed ? To undermine buildings, to throw off the weight of earth, to shoot up living branches towards the sky ? And I have *seven* seeds scattered.

MARY [*Sceptically*]

What faith !

STEPHEN

Yes—that is my faith.

MARY

It seems to me as insane as Eli Oakshott's.

STEPHEN

On the contrary, it rests on reason—on the fact that a spiritual truth is indestructible.

MARY

If yours *is* a truth.

STEPHEN

It *is*—by every law of earth and heaven it *is*.

MARY

Well, anyhow, *you're* not indestructible.

STEPHEN

What does *that* matter ?

MARY

A great deal. Before the seed has flowered you'll be frozen.

STEPHEN

What does *that* matter ?

MARY

And if the seed *never* flowers ?

STEPHEN

It *will* flower.

[*The windows rattle again.*]

MARY

Oh, my poor Stephen ! [She goes to a window that shows only a blinding whirl of snowflakes.] Look at these endless people, like white regiments marching and counter-marching, urged along by affairs that even this storm cannot interrupt ; look how the snow-crusted umbrellas scurry and swirl, each covering a head full of

its own business ; look at the packed omnibuses with their struggling spotty-white horses, the ugly, muffled-up crowds fighting for the tramcars, the hurrying, jostling traffic. And you think that in this mad rush and roar there is room for the still small voice of Stephen Trame !

STEPHEN

Yes ! Beneath all the roar and rush, there is an emptiness, a spiritual hunger. Their old creeds fade. They *must* listen to me.

MARY

I tell you, Stephen, that compared to you Eli Oakshott is sane and sober. There are moments when, coming home heart-sick from the vain quest for work, I stand at this window, gazing at this grim street as a little bird gazes at the serpent that is to swallow it up. In those moments I feel that we count as little in this great inexorable London as the sparrows that must find food or freeze. And in those moments your striving to alter the world's religion appears to me so puny, so pitiful, so hopeless, that I cry over you more as over a baby than a blasphemer.

STEPHEN

Then it is you who have lost faith, not I. Your religion claims that the very hairs of our heads are numbered.

MARY [*Staring into vacancy*]

Did I ever *have* faith ? I lived so sheltered, so

protected. Was my faith more than words ? Now, when I have lived for months with the naked realities, with the pitiless earth and the deaf sky, fighting to keep off hunger and cold, and seeing Wilfy growing coarser and coarser in that dreadful school, pray as I will to a Power above, I feel as if only I—this frail body—stood between my boy and the abyss, and that if my foot should fail, we shall all go down into that human underworld where the sound of children weeping is the worst horror of the darkness.

STEPHEN

You have not really lost faith, Mary—you are gaining it—faith in the true Power that is not only above us but in us and around us, fulfilling Its boundless Being in that eternal and universal order which is our security.

MARY [*Shivering*]

Such a God ! A glacier, rather. A God who would not move a finger to save me from seeking our bread on that street—among the other women.

STEPHEN

Hush, Mary ! What a thought !

MARY

You are outraged. So was I the first time the thought burnt through me. But one gets used to strange thoughts when one is at bay. And some day—who knows ?—when Wilfy is crying for bread—

STEPHEN

For God's sake, Mary, pull yourself together. Remember you are a Christian.

MARY

I am a mother !

STEPHEN

This is madness !

MARY

Yes it *is*, it *is* madness. The blacksmith and I are a pair. And you—you make the trinity. We are all mad together. Ha! Ha! Ha! Oh, my God, forgive these horrible thoughts, these dreadful doubts. Help us, oh, help us! [*Falls on her knees.*] Send us deliverance from these evil straits, grant us—

STEPHEN

What are you praying for ?

MARY [*Fiercely*]

For bread.

STEPHEN

That is just as mad.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

Grant us this day our daily bread—why is not my faith as sane as yours ?

STEPHEN

Because mine rests on reason ; yours contradicts it.
If bread could come by prayer, why trouble to plough ?
I thought you were learning that this is a universe of law.

MARY

The Power that made the law can break it.

STEPHEN

That would break up the universe. We must have stability.

MARY

Yes—the confidence of being in God's hands.

STEPHEN

God's hands uphold the law, not the individual.
What of the sparrows that must find food or freeze ?

MARY

I blasphemed. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father. [Folds her hands again in prayer.] O Father, which art in heaven, look down upon us, Thy suffering children, send us a redeemer, send us a redeemer—

STRANGER [Outside, in a great hearty voice with a somewhat Scotch accent]

Thank you, I'll find my way.

[A masterful knock at the door. MARY looks up transfigured.]

STEPHEN [*Murmuring to MARY*]
Who's that ?

STRANGER [*Outside*]
Can I come in ?

STEPHEN [*Whispering*]
Get up, Mary. [She remains dazed with ecstasy—he helps her to her feet.] Yes, come in !

[Enter a burly white-haired presence in a fur over-coat, overflowing with geniality and the sense of power. The whole atmosphere instantly changes to sunniness and security. MARY remains tranced, not speaking for some time.]

STRANGER [*Inquiringly*]
Mr. Stephen Trame, author of “The Next Religion” ?

STEPHEN [*Rather dazed*]
Yes—and my wife.

STRANGER
Sir ! Ma'am ! [Shoots out a hand to each.] This is the proudest moment of my life. [Pumps at their hands.] You see before you a man as free from superstition as his smelting iron from slag ; a man absolutely without prejudice—a man who inherited neither his opinions nor his millions but has made both by the sweat of his brow. Can you wonder if your book fell on me as seed on fruitful soil ?

STEPHEN [*Still more dazed, murmurs*]

Seed ?

[*MARY's hand drops the STRANGER's ; her ecstasy is shot with bewilderment.*]

STRANGER

Sir, I have the honour to beg you to enrol me as your first disciple !

[*Pumps again at STEPHEN's hand.*]

STEPHEN

I fear I can't do *that*.

STRANGER [*Disconcerted, dropping his hand*]

And why not ?

STEPHEN

There's a farmer and a school-teacher before you.

STRANGER [*Reassured*]

Oh, *that* calibre ! *They* don't count ; they can't scrap Christianity and limber up your religion for quick firing, eh ?

STEPHEN

They do their best.

STRANGER

Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! And their best leaves you over a Whitechapel tobacconist's. No, sir ! The next religion has got to hum, as the Yankees say. [*Takes both their hands again.*] To-night you sleep in Belgravia, the honoured guests of Sir Thomas McFadden.

MARY

Sir Thomas McFadden ?

SIR THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

STEPHEN

Not the inventor of guns—Hal's father ?

SIR THOMAS [*Dropping their hands*]

Don't mention that scallawag !

STEPHEN

Why, what has he done ?

SIR THOMAS

Done, sir ? Haven't you heard ?

STEPHEN

No, he never even acknowledged my book.

SIR THOMAS

I don't wonder ! After the thousands I've spent to make a decent modern man of him ! Takes advantage of my absence in the States to bring my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

MARY [*Half to herself*]

I felt something shifty about him.

STEPHEN

But what has he *done* ?

SIR THOMAS

He's become a Christian !!

STEPHEN

Is it possible ? . . . But he was always such a sophist.

SIR THOMAS

Oh, I knew that if he married that hymn-screeching Helen he would be a lost soul. First the cat gets him to marry in a church, then she gets the baby baptized, and then *facilis descensus*—down he slides into the pit.

STEPHEN

I think it only fair, Sir Thomas, to tell you that *my* wife—

MARY

Oh, leave *me* out, *please*. I agree with Sir Thomas. A man who only becomes a Christian to please his wife is contemptible.

SIR THOMAS

Contemptible isn't the word for him, ma'am. *Every*, Christian is *that*. But look at the advantages Hal has had—the chance of growing up as free from prejudice as his father. However, he'll have to pay dearly for his pew. Three millions.

MARY [Puzzled]

Three millions ?

SIR THOMAS

Three million pounds, ma'am. Fifteen million dollars, in Yankee lingo. That's the fortune I've cut him out of. And it would have been bigger if I hadn't had to sell my guns to *Christian* Governments ; millions they've done me out of. Ah, ma'am, if I could have my life over again, I'd deal very differently, I assure you.

STEPHEN

I hope you wouldn't make guns at all.

SIR THOMAS

You bet your boots I wouldn't ; there's much more money in motor-cars. However, with three millions we can give Truth a pretty good leg-up, eh ? That miserable Popish Cathedral in Westminster only cost one million.

STEPHEN

But I hope Hal won't starve.

SIR THOMAS

Starve ? No such luck ! That Christian cat of his has more dollars than I—Munro's millinery, you know. And now the scoundrel has started practising his profession and earning thousands ; just to spite me. However, I've no prejudice against him—I shall always be grateful to him for sending me your book, though when the New York Custom House charged me a dollar on it, I cussed like a Christian.

[*Smiles.*]

STEPHEN

Was it *Hal* sent it ?

SIR THOMAS

It was, sir. With your inscription to *him* in it. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! No doubt the cat wouldn't let him have it in the house. "In return for the shilling you cut me off with," he added on sarcastically. A shilling, indeed ! Sir, as I told your publisher just now, when he gave me your address, all the Church plate in the world couldn't pay for that book—though I'd like to see it all melted down. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! [Beams, and begins looking through his pocket-book.] My precious offspring little thought he was sending me a mission for my declining years.

MARY [*Dazedly*]

Do I understand, Sir Thomas, you wish to devote your fortune to my husband's religion ?

SIR THOMAS

A double-acting steam-hammer couldn't have hit the rivet more precisely. I've got nobody to leave it to—I can't take it *with* me—and I want to enjoy seeing it work before I fizz out in the crematorium. *I* had to work for *it*—now let it work for *me*. Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

MARY

You mean, work at remoulding Christianity ?

SIR THOMAS

Remoulding, ma'am? [Searching in his pockets.] If you'll come to my blast-furnaces you'll see that to run into new moulds things have got to have some substance to 'em. [Looking through his pocket-book again.] Dear me ! What can I have done with it ?

MARY

Have you lost anything ?

SIR THOMAS

It must have got among my business papers. Will you excuse me while I look through the hand-bags in my car ?

STEPHEN

Can't I bring them up ? [Going politely to door.]

SIR THOMAS [Hurrying in front of him]

I couldn't dream of it, Master. You don't mind my calling you Master ?

[Exit.]

MARY [With shining eyes]

O Stephen ! How happy you must be !

STEPHEN

Happy ? When the devil takes me up to a high mountain—

MARY [Murmurs]

The devil ?

STEPHEN

And shows me all the kingdoms of the world ?

MARY [Alarmed]

You are not going to *refuse* his millions ?

STEPHEN

How can I accept them ? The man doesn't understand the next religion one iota.

MARY

How can you say that ?

STEPHEN

Didn't you hear the allusion to the Roman Catholic Cathedral ? His only idea is to build buildings, with paid priests no doubt, and a ritual that will run as mechanically as his steam-rollers.

MARY

But how else *can* a religion—— ?

STEPHEN

And you have typed my book !

MARY

If *I* haven't understood it, how do you expect the world—— ?

STEPHEN

Haven't I devoted two chapters to show the corruptions that creep into all religions, and another chapter

to show how alone they can be avoided ? The Temple must be of the spirit, not built by hands ; even the religion must be more of a groping than a grasping, it can't be crystallised to suit a congregation, it must be for the individual soul. Paid priests would bring back hypocrisy or—worse !—dogmas ; cast-iron dogmas appropriately blasted in Sir Thomas's furnaces and run into his moulds. A pretty reform !

MARY

But you believe *something*.

STEPHEN

Yes—something flowing, like life, not fixed—like death : the continuous inspiration of the Holy Ghost broadening from age to age with the growth of knowledge and civilisation.

MARY

But even if the *faith* is not fixed, the *believers* must be. They must be organised round a centre and they must stand shoulder to shoulder, if only against persecution. Think of poor Andrews.

STEPHEN

And who is to guarantee the believers won't persecute in *their* turn ?

MARY

That is your look-out. Keep the Holy Ghost *alive* in them. But there must be a Church Visible. Organised,

too, they can do some of that swamp-cleaning you talk of. Single scavengers with brooms won't do much—you want gangs and steam-dredgers.

STEPHEN [*Stubbornly*]

Works can be organised, not faith.

MARY

Then go ahead with the works. And *you* are responsible for Andrews—you can give him a post, save his wife and child.

STEPHEN

He wouldn't want to be saved—at the cost of the religion.

MARY

But he'd want your book saved—it would rise like a phœnix from father's bonfire. You could publish tens of thousands in every language, scatter your seeds through the world.

STEPHEN

There's something in *that*.

MARY

And Andrews is a born preacher. You owe him a better pulpit than Victoria Park.

STEPHEN

But *I* should be the preacher.

MARY

Yes, but you will want assistants. And there'll be your Training College for your clergy.

STEPHEN [In horror]

Build up a new priesthood?

MARY

You can't organise the believers without a building, and the building must have ministers as much as charwomen and doorkeepers.

STEPHEN

Paid priests are the curse of religion. Every man must be his own priest.

MARY

And a pretty job the amateurs will make of it. I know those sects with their drab decorations and dull orations. Think of those weird Dissenters at Dymthorpe with their little tin chapel—you never went in or you'd know what inspired greengrocers are like. Surely religion needs the noblest words and the finest music.

STEPHEN]

If the words are *true!*

MARY

That is *your* affair. No, my dear Stephen, the fact is, you haven't thought out the next religion one bit.

STEPHEN

Not thought it out ? With a book of four hundred pages !

MARY

Pure theory ! When it comes to practice you're as much a baby in religion as in business. Because institutions grow corrupt if not looked after, you cry, " Away with institutions !" As well say, " Away with families—there's so much sickness it's healthier not to be born."

STEPHEN

But even granting institutions are unavoidable, I'm not going to found my Church on guns.

MARY

What finer foundation ? " And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares "—that's holy prophecy.

STEPHEN

You're as terrible a sophist as Hal himself. But I'll be no party to disinheriting him.

MARY

He was disinherited before Sir Thomas ever heard of you.

STEPHEN

Anyhow I won't be backed by a gunmaker.

MARY

Weren't the Nobel prizes founded by the inventor of dynamite? Sir Thomas made guns as he'd make mowing machines. What would you have him do with his money? The poor man perhaps wishes to atone for having made *man*-mowing machines. And you—a religious teacher—Here he comes. Better let *me* arrange with him.

STEPHEN [*Dazed*]

You?

[Enter SIR THOMAS, flourishing a cheque; he hands it to STEPHEN.]

SIR THOMAS

There, Master! That's for the first expenses.

STEPHEN

Ten thousand pounds! Oh, but this is too—

MARY

Give it to me, Stephen, and I'll open an account with it. [Takes it from him.] Oh, just sign it on the back. [She brings the pen and ink from the mantelpiece and he signs dazedly.] And how, Sir Thomas, do you wish this expended?

SIR THOMAS

Well, what I figured was half of it for your husband's first year's salary as general organiser—

STEPHEN [*In horror*]

No! No!

SIR THOMAS [*In apologetic misunderstanding*]
Well, call it High Priest—I've no prejudices. My tongue fires off business words—that's all.

MARY [*Hastily*]
And the other five thousand?

SIR THOMAS

Well, you see I calculated that a Temple tip-top enough to wipe out that shrine of superstition in Westminster would take years. So while the architects and artists and painters and paperhanglers are planning and perspiring—and we'll get all the eighty-ton talent in Europe, you bet—I concluded we had best buy up an old church or hall to start our services slap-bang. I've got my eye on a workmanlike little place in a commanding position with a ten-year lease—it was in the Baptist line before but I'm a man without prejudices. And if your husband will come right along with me and look at it—

MARY
Yes—yes—go, Stephen. [She picks up his scarf.]

SIR THOMAS [*Intervening*]
Allow me, Master.

[Takes off his fur coat and puts it reverently round STEPHEN.]

STEPHEN [*Resisting*]
But what will you do?

SIR THOMAS

Oh, there's always a coat in the car. There ! Makes you look *twice* the prophet. Come along, Master, good-bye, Mrs. Trame—this is a great day in history !

[*As they near the door it flies open.*]

WILFRED [*Bursting in*]

Where's my satchel ?

SIR THOMAS [*Catching him in his arms*]

And who's this ?

[*WILFRED hangs his head, surprised into bashful silence.*]

STEPHEN

That's my little boy.

SIR THOMAS [*Lifting up WILFRED's chin*]

What a bright little chap ! We'll bring him up to follow his father in the Temple. Good-bye, little High Priest. [*Exeunt SIR THOMAS and STEPHEN.*]

MARY [*Hoarsely, as the door closes*]

No ! No ! [*She snatches WILFRED to her breast.*] Oh, Wilfy, what have I done ? What have I done ? But it was for your sake, dear, for your sake and your father's !

[*She bursts into a fit of sobbing over the bewildered WILFRED as the Curtain falls.*]

Act III

An October afternoon nearly ten years later. The vestry of St. Thomas's Temple, a spacious, handsome, brand-new room, with coloured windows in which Mazzini, Emerson, and Swinburne appear like saints, and brand-new carved oaken presses for the clerical robes, and brand-new oaken chairs, and all along the wall at back a great table completely covered by a brand-new richly dyed cloth, reaching to the ground, on which stand unlit many tall wax candles in newly wrought golden candlesticks. A perpetually lit taper burns before a portrait of SIR THOMAS. There is a door R. down stage, which swings towards the Cathedral in opening, and a door L., in the middle of the wall, giving on the street and swinging towards the vestry, but now locked and bolted. SILAS BURR, the Sacristan, in an imposing gown of blue with silver spots and carrying a great staff of office stands by the table looking towards door R. His hair and beard are sprinkled with grey and his face like that of all the characters bears marks of the passage of ten years. As the curtain rises, there comes from the Temple the singing of "Amen—Amen—Amen" in long-drawn fugal melody to the accompaniment of the organ, and ere the last "Amen" dies away BURR throws open door R. and there enters from the Temple a procession of youths in golden mantles bearing palms, each youth alternating with a maiden in white carrying Madonna lilies. BURR goes back to the great table and the procession moves across front of stage to L., then curves round towards

the table and as each member passes BURR, he or she gives him the palms or lilies and he lays them between the candlesticks; the procession then winds round to the door of entry and goes out, the organ still playing the Finale. At the rear of the procession enters STEPHEN, now a white-bearded prophetic figure in ample and flowing robes of creamy satin, with a long train borne by WILFRED, now a youth of eighteen or so, and ANDREWS, now in maturer manhood. Both WILFRED and ANDREWS wear gold fillets on their heads and Greek togas. These three figures do not curve round with the procession, but STEPHEN, who has now discarded spectacles, being blind, leads the way with firm step to a chair and sits on it. Then, while WILFRED kneels by his side lovingly, and he holds and smooths WILFRED's hand, ANDREWS goes to a press and gets a purple robe which he brings back on his arm. By this time the procession has gone back to the Temple, BURR closes the door, and the organ winds up the Finale.

WILFRED [*His face shining with enthusiasm*]
Well, father, didn't the Dedication go splendidly ?

STEPHEN

Thanks to your music, my dear Wilfred.

ANDREWS

Oh, Master, but if you could have *seen* it all !

STEPHEN

I did see it all, dear Andrews, with my inner eye.

Nay, I almost think that being blind made me realise all the wonder and holiness of it more than if I had been distracted by the sight of the ladies' bonnets or the men's neckties. I saw only the souls—the souls united in the divine ecstasy of consecrating this Temple of the future.

BURR

Ay, Master, and such thousands of souls and all their faces wet as you pronounced the Benediction. Do you know I had to bolt yon door against the crowd in the street—they would have invaded the vestry. Ah, if only Eli Oakshott could have seen it !

WILFRED [*Smiling*]

You've still got the blacksmith on the brain.

BURR

Well, didn't he *hammer* himself on my brain, in a manner of speaking ? [*At door R., opening it.*] Shall I tell you, Master, when the five minutes are up ?

ANDREWS

Ten minutes this morning, Burr, for the silent communion with the Infinite. We must mark the day.

WILFRED

And give father a little time to rest and meditate his sermon.

STEPHEN

My sermon needs no meditation. The True Immor-

tality is a theme that sets all my blood aglow. Ah, friend Burr, if only *he* could have seen it all !

BURR

You mean Sir Thomas.

[*Sighs as he goes into the Temple.*]

STEPHEN

Yes, that is the man who should be in all our minds to-day—our great Founder; not a crack-brained blacksmith. Fortunately my memorial sermon will bring him back to us all.

ANDREWS

The name of our Temple surely does that.

STEPHEN

Words grow so meaningless. Thousands will talk of St. Thomas's with no grateful vision of that large genial figure.

WILFRED

Does that matter, father? Why should we want to live on in people's memories any more than in a future world? Enough that Sir Thomas lives on in all the high thoughts and deeds inspired by this holy building.

STEPHEN [*Playfully pinching his ear*]

My successor anticipates my sermon. Would he like to preach it instead of me? [WILFRED shudders.] Well, you'll have to some day.

WILFRED [*Rising*]

Don't, father. Andrews is waiting with your pulpit robe.

ANDREWS [*Smiling*]

And it's rather large for Wilfred.

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

And besides, Wilfred will want something more decorative.

WILFRED

Oh no, father. We must keep to a tradition.

STEPHEN

I'm only jesting. Really, Wilfred, you've quite converted me to the value of decoration and symbolism. [*They slowly take off his Dedication robe.*] Changing into my ordinary robe now—like the choir putting away their palms and lilies—how well it symbolises the fact that St. Thomas's is now consecrated and the plain everyday work must begin. Not to mention that in ascending the pulpit I should probably have tripped over that train.

WILFRED [*As they put the purple robe on him*]

Hadn't we better lead you, in any case?

STEPHEN

Lead me? When I know every inch of my new Temple as though I had never preached anywhere else! How proudly and thankfully I've paced every

corridor, every stairway. Give me the Consecration robe, I will put it away myself. [Walks firmly to an oaken press and hangs it up.] You see !

ANDREWS

Then we will leave you.

STEPHEN .

Let Wilfred stay with me.

[Feels for WILFRED's hand and holds it.]

WILFRED [To ANDREWS]

Then will you see that the organist starts my Requiem the moment father comes in ?

ANDREWS

You mean "Rejoice, the righteous cannot die."

WILFRED

Yes—the prelude to his sermon.

ANDREWS [Going into the Temple]

I'll arrange a signal.

WILFRED

Thank you, Boggles.

[Exit ANDREWS.]

STEPHEN

And thank *you*, my dear son. [Kisses him.] Your jubilant music will lift me to the pulpit.

WILFRED

Dear father ! Now at last your religion is built on a rock. This glorious Temple guarantees permanence.

STEPHEN

No. *You* guarantee that.

WILFRED

I sometimes tremble at the responsibility, far off though it is.

STEPHEN

Do not tremble. [*Lays his hand on WILFRED's head.*] I say to you, as Moses said to Joshua, be strong and of a good courage.

WILFRED

But perhaps Andrews would make a stronger successor.

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]

Andrews ? You don't think he was jealous in saying the robe was too large for you ?

WILFRED

Oh no ! He's quite satisfied with his position as head of the Training College. Still the robe *would* fit him better.

STEPHEN

Well, you've time to grow—like our religion. You won't be always eighteen. Oh dear ! [*Snaps fingers.*]

WILFRED

What is it ?

STEPHEN

I left those cables in my Consecration robe.

WILFRED [*Going to the oaken press*]

What do you want with them ? You can't read them.

STEPHEN

No, but I can finger them as I preach—my pores can suck in their electric stimulus. Ah ! [*Clutches the sheaf of cables from WILFRED's hand as a miser clutches bank-notes.*] Think of it, Wilfred. Hardly a capital in civilisation without a branch or a cognate church or at least a disciple ! [*Cramming them into a pocket of the robe.*] Fermentation everywhere. Everywhere the old thought decays and dies, the new is burgeoning and blossoming. I can only see the start, you will live to see all civilisation under your banner.

WILFRED

But am I not rather the artist of the movement—the banner-weaver, not the banner-bearer ?

STEPHEN

Because you show us the holiness of beauty, cannot you also show us the beauty of holiness ? No, no, dear Wilfred [*Patting his head*], I am quite happy about you.

WILFRED

And about everything, I hope.

STEPHEN

Well, you know the one cloud.

WILFRED

You mean mother.

STEPHEN

I suppose I ought to be thankful she joins in our social work. But her standing out all these years against our religion is like a deadening symbol of the forces we have still to subdue. If only *she* could have been here to-day !

WILFRED

She is here ! [STEPHEN starts convulsively.] Oh, but perhaps I oughtn't to have spoiled the surprise.

STEPHEN [*Transfigured*]

Here ! Mother here !

WILFRED

Yes, sitting just by this door.

STEPHEN

But she said she was going to the Church Bazaar.

WILFRED

At the last moment she came here.

STEPHEN [*Depressed again*]

Ah, I understand—to hear your new music.

WILFRED

Not entirely, I think.

STEPHEN

Then it was to see the Temple !

WILFRED [*Shaking his head*]

As you passed her just now, she caught the end of
your robe that I was bearing and kissed it.

STEPHEN

Wilfred ! Is there some dazzling light here, or am I
still blind ?

WILFRED

I could read in her face she would have liked to follow
you in but feared to tire you.

STEPHEN

Your angel-mother ! As if anything could quicken
me more than to hear from *her* lips the confession of
our faith. But no ! it cannot be true.

WILFRED [*Opening door, whispers and beckons*]

Mother !

[*MARY glides in, her head covered by a black man-*
tilla, and clasps WILFRED in a swift loving embrace.]

MARY [*Cooingly*]

My little musician !

[*She releases him and he glides into the Temple.*]

STEPHEN [*Yearning towards her*]

Mary ! [*Opens arms gropingly ; MARY falls into them.*]

MARY

Stephen !

STEPHEN

Then it is true ? You *have* come to us ?

MARY

How could I hold back any longer ?

STEPHEN [*Releasing her, burst*]

You mean because the Temple is built, my faith made visible in stone.

MARY

Oh, Stephen, I feared you would think that, and it has kept me from you—all this newspaper noise, this blare and flare of glory. But I nerved myself to face your contempt—I felt I owed you the truth.

STEPHEN

Forgive my doubting, dearest—the truth was so dazzling.

MARY

No, I deserve your doubt—oh, why did I not come

over to you when you were starving in Whitechapel—
when you stood alone against the world ? What com-
fort my conversion would have brought you then !
How shall I ever forgive myself ?

STEPHEN

Darling, your coming over to us to-day is such a
consummation, such a climax, that I almost feel I
would not have had it earlier. Oh, Mary, to think
I have converted you at last.

MARY

No, Stephen—it is not *you* who have converted me.

STEPHEN

Not *I* ? Why, who then ?

MARY

Wilfy.

STEPHEN

Wilfred ?

MARY .

Didn't you magnanimously leave his religious training
to *me* ?

STEPHEN

Because I felt that the woman who has all the suffering
in the birth of a child has the real parental right.

MARY

I know your reason, dear. Well, you have your reward. Despite all my pious lessons and catechisms, despite all Wilfy's church-going, you know how his heart turned more and more to your teaching.

STEPHEN

I knew it was a great grief to you, though you said nothing.

MARY

Yes, it was a great grief, but it was also one of those sorrows that educate. For I said to myself, if the heart of *youth* goes towards this religion, then surely this religion is blessed of God to be the next religion, and we that are old and set must cast off our prejudices, we must try to look through the eyes of youth.

STEPHEN

Excellently argued, dearest. Yes, children train us more than we them, and through Wilfred's eyes you have seen what these old blind ones could not show you.

MARY

But they are wonderful eyes. [*Kisses them.*] They saw the young truth such years and years ago. Oh, I could go down on my knees to you—I stood out against you, I fought you, I embittered you, perhaps it was I who stole the light from you.

STEPHEN

Hush—never say that ! But for you the light would have faded years before.

MARY

But I lived with a king of men and did not know his greatness—I worried when I should have worshipped. Oh, it was right of you to reproach me ! Now that the world is at your feet, now that your star has risen over mankind, I come fawning and grovelling. [Sinks at his feet.] But do not cast me off—let me, too, call you Master ! [Clings to his knees.]

STEPHEN [Raising her]

Dearest, dearest, but for you it could all never have been.

MARY

That's what I sometimes dare to tell myself—it was in answer to my prayer that poor Sir Thomas came.

STEPHEN [Releasing her, more coldly]

I did not mean that. Our religion acknowledges no such answers to prayer.

MARY

But surely the answer *did* come—and it has worked in my mind that God wished your religion to be.

STEPHEN

You must hear my sermon, Mary, you must learn more of your new religion.

MARY [*Humbly*]

Yes, yes, I will go back. [Turns to the Temple door.]

STEPHEN

Dear Mary [*Takes her hand again*], don't you see that the only prayer is work? It is just because there is no caprice in God's universe, just because the hammer will *always* hit the anvil if the hand is steady, that our Church can look forward to beating' our planet into the shape of our yearning—a world of purity, peace, and brotherhood.

MARY

I see, Master.

STEPHEN

Good-bye for a little, then.

[*He lays his hands on her head in silent blessing.*]

MARY

Good-bye . . . [She goes. At the door she turns with a sob.] And you never noticed what I was wearing!

STEPHEN

How could I, dear?

MARY

Your *hands* were upon it.

STEPHEN

Do you mean your mantilla?

MARY [*Comes nearer*]

Your mantilla, Stephen—the mantilla you bought me in Madrid—on our honeymoon. [Sadly.] You don't remember.

STEPHEN

Of course I remember.

MARY [*Eagerly going to him*]

And you understand why I put it on to-day ?

STEPHEN

Yes, dearest, and I kiss my saint's aureole.

[*He kisses the mantilla.*]

MARY [*Smiling happily*]

Aureoles are golden.

[*Enter BURR.*]

STEPHEN [*Pricking up his ears*]

Is it time ?

BURR

Nearly, Master. But there's a new worshipper who takes *me* for the Infinite, in a manner of speaking.

STEPHEN

What do you mean ?

.. BURR

Keeps communing with *me*. Wants me to bring him to *you*. There's his card.

MARY [*Taking card and reading it*]

"Must run away—give me one minute. Hal McFadden, M.D., M.R.C.S., &c." That dreadful man ! You must not see him.

STEPHEN

The son of our Founder ! I can hardly refuse.

MARY

Not now—after the service. He will tire you.

STEPHEN

But suppose he too has joined us ! What a wonderful climax and inspiration !

MARY

If he had joined us, why should he be running away ?

STEPHEN

Doctors are not their own masters. . . . But strictly for a minute, tell him, Burr.

MARY

And then you must rest a few moments—don't come sooner. Wilfy shall summon you—I'll tell him. And meantime Andrews can read a Psalm.

STEPHEN

No, no, not a Psalm.

MARY [*Quietly*]

Psalm 104—the one I took a text from for your harvest
160

sermon. It just suits our religion—not a word about prayer, nor a future life.

STEPHEN

No more there is ! A great cosmic poem !

MARY [Smiling]

And long, too.

STEPHEN [Smiling back]

Wonderful woman ! You've only just joined us and already you're running the service. You'll soon be in my pulpit.

MARY

Why not ? Since you have sex-equality ! [Door opens ; HAL appears with BURR.] Here comes your friend.

[She bows to HAL, who bows back, and she goes out with BURR, while HAL comes forward and the door closes. His face has grown far finer with maturity ; a touch of grey in the hair makes it almost spiritual.]

HAL [Semi-sarcastically]

Well, Stephen !

STEPHEN

Glad to see you, Hal—sit down !

HAL

No, thanks—I must fly to my wife ; I promised to pick her up at the Church Bazaar and take her to Evensong.

STEPHEN [*Disappointed*]
Ha ! Then you *haven't* come over to us ?

HAL
I ? God forbid ! I came out of curiosity.

STEPHEN
To see the Temple ?

HAL
To see what had become of my money !

STEPHEN
Ah yes—I had almost forgotten. Well—you have seen.

HAL
That's just what I haven't.

STEPHEN
I'm afraid I don't understand.

HAL
Seen nothing, I mean, to justify all the trumpeting
and squandering.

STEPHEN
To justify it ? Of course not. Not if you really turned
Christian.

HAL
Oh, it isn't so much as a Christian that I grumble,

it's as a man who sees his millions wasted—millions that might have served some great purpose.

STEPHEN [*Coldly*]

I beg to think ours *is* a great purpose.

HAL

No—only a great mistake. Unless to split the Church wantonly be a great purpose.

STEPHEN [*Angrily*]

Wantonly ?

HAL

And unjustifiably. You have a Temple beautiful indeed, but not so beautiful as St. Paul's or the Abbey. I see priests and choristers, pomp and pageantry, but your ritual, like your building and your furniture, lacks the historic glamour which comes with centuries of tradition.

STEPHEN [*Hotly*]

And the historic error !

HAL

Let me finish. I see a hymn-book, but free as it is from the crudities which unfortunately disfigure our Christian hymn-book, your liturgy cannot compare with the massive majesty of the Bible.

STEPHEN

Now you have caught yourself out. Though we draw

on all the great writers, we preserve wherever possible
the language of the Bible.

HAL

The less reason, then, for cutting away from us. As
for your music—

STEPHEN [*Murmuring*]

Wilfred's music—

HAL

Wilfred is a genius, I don't question. But even *you*
would scarcely class his work with Bach's Passion
music.

STEPHEN [*Sternly*]

At least we do not glorify the Passion.

HAL

You glorify self-sacrifice—is there so much difference?

STEPHEN

You can't be a very orthodox Christian if you say
that.

HAL

Was Christ such an orthodox Christian?

STEPHEN

I am not talking of Christ's Christianity, but of
Christianity as it really is: your wife's Christianity,
for example.

HAL [*Quietly*]

You thought Helen had converted me.

STEPHEN

So your father understood.

HAL

My father understood nothing—well, to give the dead their due, nothing but mechanics. I don't say Helen didn't *influence* me—one can't live with a reverential nature like hers and remain spiritually untouched—but what really turned me back to the fatherhood of God was my own experience of fatherhood.

STEPHEN

It was just that experience that drove *me* to the next religion.

HAL

The *next* religion? Before we've worked out the last? What have you found more beautiful or uplifting than the words of Christ? And this religion has the advantage of being already organised—it carries the inspiration and consecration of the centuries.

STEPHEN

And their encrustation of error! And their petrifications!

HAL

Then vivify it, scour it, bring it back to the Founder.

'Perhaps Christ's own religion has never had a chance—
perhaps *that's* the next religion.

STEPHEN

I prefer Truth, fresh and living, new-risen from the well.

HAL

New-risen? Oh, my dear Stephen, what is there new that is true? Time, Space, Life, Death, Soul, Body—what old, old mysteries, what terrible brand-new realities, as strange under the electric light as they were under the stars of the ancient East. Think what Science shouted when you and I were at Oxford, and how one dogma after another has broken down. How much is left even of Darwin and Herbert Spencer?

STEPHEN

Their spirit is left—the revelation of Science is a method, not a dogma.

HAL [*Sneeringly*]

The revelation of Science! I, a man of science, and a doctor, tell you that we know nothing.

STEPHEN

I don't wonder any longer you turned Christian. My only wonder is you don't turn Catholic.

HAL

I am not so near Catholicism as you!

STEPHEN

As I ?

HAL

These palms, lilies, candles, canticles——

STEPHEN

Things of beauty are joys for ever—and for everybody !
Why should false religions monopolise them ?

HAL

Yes, or make a corner in Saints ? St. Thomas ! Ha !
Ha ! Ha ! My blessed father !

STEPHEN

I wanted it called the Minster of the Holy Ghost—it
was my congregation that wanted St. Thomas——

HAL

Yes—and one day they'll want St. Stephen.

STEPHEN

That I shall forbid.

HAL

They will only think you all the greater Saint.

STEPHEN

Even so they will be thinking of my life, not of my
dead bones performing miracles.

HAL [*Grimly*]

Wait ! You haven't died yet.

STEPHEN

Don't talk nonsense ! My followers follow Truth, not me.

HAL [*Sarcastically*]

So you actually think your triumph has been the triumph of Truth !

STEPHEN

Of what else ? Ah, you mean your money.

HAL

No. Money alone can do little. With millions behind them newspapers and theatres fail—so why not churches ?

STEPHEN

Then it *was* my vision of the Truth——

HAL

On the contrary. It was your blindness—your sheer physical blindness.

STEPHEN

Eh ?

HAL

Oh, I've watched your career. Your eloquence and my money brought you a decent crowd. But it wasn't

till you stood in the pulpit, blind, that you were a sensation. That made you a sort of martyr—and the more you denounced Christianity the more you illustrated its principle of suffering and self-sacrifice.

STEPHEN [*Sneering*]

What wonderful sophistry! Then according to you I might as well have remained a Christian.

HAL [*Cheerfully*]

Precisely. But on second thoughts I don't regret my millions. You have shown that Christianity can't be improved on—the lesson was cheap at the price.
Good-bye. [Clasps STEPHEN's hand.]

STEPHEN [*Detaining his hand*]

No—I can't let you go, saying that.

WILFRED [*Opening the Temple door*]

The Psalm is over, father.

STEPHEN [*Impatiently*]

Just a moment. [WILFRED disappears, the door closes.] With the same Satanic sophistry that in your Oxford days sapped my old belief, you now try to show that I have nothing new to teach. You forget that I have thrown overboard the Christian demand for personal immortality and taught mankind to meet life with love and death with dignity.

HAL

To do good without hope of reward makes you even more Christian than the Christians.

STEPHEN

More quibbling! To give up a heaven is to give up Christianity.

HAL

How about "The Kingdom of God is *within you*" ?
That doesn't say much about a *future* heaven.

STEPHEN

You are incorrigible !

HAL [*Going to the street door*]

So Helen will say if I don't turn up at the Church Bazaar. Can I get out through this door ? I don't want to disturb the congregation.

STEPHEN

You'll have to unbolt it, I think.

HAL [*Shooting back the bolt*]

Thank you. [*Turns back the key.*]

STEPHEN

But surely you ought to stay for my sermon. It's a tribute to your father.

HAL

To my father ?

STEPHEN

A memorial sermon—could I do less on this Day of
170

Dedication ? And Wilfred has written a Requiem—but of jubilation : “ Rejoice, the righteous cannot die.”

HAL [*Slightly opening the street door*]

You and Wilfred owe a tribute to my father. But what do *I* owe him ?

STEPHEN [*Sternly*]
Christian charity !

HAL [*Closing the street door*]

I am rebuked.

[*He goes back silently to door R., opens it, and returns to the Temple. As the Temple door swings to, the street-door L. is thrown open from without, and ELI OAKSHOTT's frenzied figure appears with his hammer; he is older and greyer and fiercer, and without his apron, but essentially unchanged. He slams the door behind him.*]

STEPHEN [*Wheeling at the sound*]
Who's there ?

OAKSHOTT

The Lord has delivered you into my hands ! [He raises his hammer] . . . Why don't you flinch, curse you ? . . . Ah, you are blind ! I can't strike a man who is blind. [Lowers hammer.]

STEPHEN

Why should you strike any man ?

OAKSHOTT

You ask me that ! You Judas, who have built this Temple of antichrist.

STEPHEN

Ha ! You are Eli Oakshott.

OAKSHOTT

Yes, curse you.

STEPHEN

I thought I knew the voice.

OAKSHOTT

I've waited here for hours to bash your brains out, and now the Lord has paralysed my hand.

STEPHEN

Then down on your knees and thank Him.

OAKSHOTT

Yes, when that serpent Burr has licked the dust.

STEPHEN

Go home : go back to Dymthorpe. Farmer Burr is not here.

OAKSHOTT

Farmer Burr *be* here. He goaded me to come. And every spark that flew up from my anvil cried out : Go up—go up, for this is the day of the Lord God of Hosts, a day of vengeance.

WILFRED [*Looking in*]
Father, you *must* come—

OAKSHOTT

A-a-ah ! The son of Belial !

[*With a great raucous cry he raises his hammer and darts at the astonished WILFRED, who flees back but cannot close the door before the blacksmith is through. As it closes on the couple, WILFRED's voice rings out in a scream of alarm.*]

WILFRED [*Outside*]

Mother !

[*There is a responsive shriek in MARY's voice, the thud of a falling body, a great panic-stricken hub bub.*]

STEPHEN

Mary ! Who is hurt ? Wilfred ! Mary !

[*He hurries towards the door, but in his distraction strikes against an obstacle and remains groping.*]

VOICES [*Shouting outside*]

Hold him ! Tie his arms !

HAL [*Shouting outside*]

No violence ! Take him out to a constable.

[*The hub bub and the sound of the struggle go on for a few moments, then the door half opens.*]

HAL [*At door*]

Make room, please ; carry him in here.

MARY [*Outside, in a tragic but firm voice*]

Wait, let me cover his face.

[*A pause ; then the sound of another fall.*]

HAL [*At door*]

She has fainted. Carry her to a window. Bring him through here !

STEPHEN [*Groping*]

Wilfred ! Where is Wilfred ?

[*ANDREWS and BURR, weeping, carry in the body of WILFRED, a black mantilla thrown over the face.*

A noise of voices and of weeping comes from the congregation ; the door closes, shutting it out.]

HAL

Set him down here.

[*They lay the body in the centre of the floor.*]

STEPHEN

Hal ! Hal ! What is happening ?

HAL

Your wife has fainted.

STEPHEN

She's not hurt ?

HAL

No. She was very brave.

STEPHEN

But Wilfred ?

HAL

My poor Stephen ! [He takes his hand.] Your boy is sorely stricken.

STEPHEN [*Hoarsely*]

Not dead ?

HAL

His skull is fractured ; he is unconscious.

STEPHEN [*Frantically*]

But not dead ?

HAL

I will feel his pulse again. [Kneels by body ; a pause.]

STEPHEN [*Frenziedly*]

Not dead ?

HAL [*Rising*]

God give you strength !

STEPHEN

Wilfred ! Where are you ? Take me to him !

[*Gropes.*]

ANDREWS

Oh, Master !

[*Guides him.*]

HAL

He died instantaneously ; that's a mercy.

STEPHEN [*Falling sobbing on body*]

Oh, my son, my son ! [Feels mantilla, but does not lift it.]

HAL

I must see to your wife, and then I must notify the death. Christ comfort you, Stephen.

[*Exit to Temple.*]

BURR [*Sobbing*]

Eli will be hanged, but the crime was mine in a manner of speaking. I wish I could die instead of him.

ANDREWS [*Checking his own sobs*]

Tears are useless now, Burr. Throw open the great doors ; let the congregation go !

STEPHEN

No ! [Rises in majestic stoicism.] The service must go on—as the world must go on. Let the youths make the choir-circuits for the dead. Andrews—you know where the candles are. Otherwise change nothing. The Requiem to begin when I enter [His voice breaks.]—it will be his own Requiem now. [Firmly again.] Then I shall preach.

ANDREWS

As you will, Master.

[*Exit to Temple.*]

[Burr, weeping more restrainedly, takes the perpetually burning taper, and lights up all the candles in the great golden candlesticks.]

STEPHEN [*Half collapsing again*]

If I had only listened to Mary, and not let Hal come !

[Unconsciously his hands pull the congratulatory cables from the pocket of his robe, and crumple them. Burr, the taper still in his hand, goes to the

door and opens it for the procession and STEPHEN draws himself up rigidly, but his hands continue to crumple the cables into a smaller and smaller ball. The youths in their golden mantles re-enter, each carrying a tall lighted candle. The door remains open so that the noise of outside wailing is heard as a ground bass for the chant. They circle slowly once round the body and back to the Temple.]

ANDREWS [As he enters]

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery.

YOUTHS

He cometh up and is cut down like a flower. He fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

ANDREWS

But Thou, O Eternal, wert, before the mountains were brought forth.

YOUTHS

Or ever the earth and the world were made.

ANDREWS

For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday:

YOUTHS

Seeing that is past as a watch in the night.

ANDREWS

Yet in the briefest life of man may be divine greatness and glory.

YOUTHS

And in short measures life may perfect be.

[*The procession has now arrived at door R.*]

ANDREWS [*Leading it back into the Temple*]

Man that is born of a woman—

[*The litany is repeated till the door closes on them with BURR bringing up the rear; the sounds from without sink to an inarticulate chanting on a ground bass of sobbing which goes like a musical accompaniment through the scene, only rising to articulateness as the procession in its ambit passes near the door.*]

STEPHEN [*Relaxing his rigidity as the door closes*]

Oh, why was I not stricken down instead!

[*His head sinks on his breast, he is shaken with sobs. After a moment or two the Temple door slightly reopens.*]

HAL [*Outside*]

No, no, Mrs. Trame, don't go in.

MARY

I am better, I tell you. Let go the handle. I must go in.

HAL [*Pulling the door to*]
You will only faint again.

[*Key heard turning outside.*]

MARY [*Shrieking outside*]
How dare you keep me from him ?

STEPHEN [*Murmurs*]
God help her ! [Moves half-consciously towards door.]
[*A weird silence. Then three great bangs at the door with a fist.*]

MARY [*Without*]
Wilfy ! Let me in !

STEPHEN [*Near door, loudly*]
She must come to her dead !

[*The door opens and closes again. MARY with the tearless look of a somnambulist comes through and seeing her husband's agonised face goes straight to him.*]

MARY
Oh, Stephen ! My poor Stephen.
[*Embraces him, pressing her face to his.*]

STEPHEN
Don't think of me !

MARY
All your pride and happiness gone, all the glory of the day destroyed.

STEPHEN

Your face is dry and burning—cry, Mary, cry your heart out on mine.

MARY

He called out “Mother” when the blow fell. Didn’t you hear it? Just like when he was a little boy and something frightened him. That was his last word—“Mother!”

STEPHEN

Yes, yes; I heard.

MARY

I’ve put my mantilla over his face, do you see? I used to put it over his cradle at Dymthorpe to keep off the mosquitoes. When you bought it on our honeymoon, you never thought of the use it would be put to—as a mosquito curtain, did you?

[*Smiling wanly.*]

ANDREWS [*As the procession is passing outside*]

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery.

MARY [*Her smile dying*]

What is he saying?

YOUTHS

He cometh up and is cut down like a flower. He fleeth . . .

[*The chant dies inarticulately away.*]

MARY [*Tragically, and as though struggling to awake*]
Cut down ? Who else is cut down ?

STEPHEN

Nobody else, dear. They are going round the choir.
Didn't you see them ?

MARY

I saw nothing, but a closed door. What are they going
round for ?

STEPHEN

It is one of our ceremonies. The death-circuit.

MARY [*As if awaking*]

For Wilfred ? And they will bury him ? [Screams
terribly] A-h-h-h ! Wilfy is dead ! My little son is
dead ! They will take him from me !

STEPHEN

No, no ! [Takes her hands.] They will not bury him
yet. [She frees her hands.] Yes, go to him ; you can
still hold him in your arms.

MARY [*Kneeling beside the body*]

Wilfy !

[She takes the passive hand, then drops it with a
shudder as of mortal cold. Her hand hovers over
the mantilla, but unable to bear to unveil the face,
she draws her hand back and covers her own face
instead. Then she rises resolutely and walks to the
table.]

STEPHEN

Where are you going ?

MARY

God has not given me your merciful blindness.

[*She gathers up palms and lilies.*]

STEPHEN

What is that rustling ?

MARY

I am covering him up with palms and lilies.

[*Lays them on the body.*]

STEPHEN

I understand. You wish to keep the face you knew.

MARY

Yes ; all his faces but this.

STEPHEN

All his faces ?

MARY

You do not know them ? [*Arranges palms and lilies as she speaks in happy dreamy retrospection.*] First, the teeny tiny face with shut eyes, and hair like a faint golden dust ; then the merry-eyed little mite of a face with curls ; then the sweet serious face of the little musician up in the church-loft, playing the organ ; then the schoolboy face, roguish and studious by turns, then—but they float and mingle before me, dear kissable uncountable faces, and how could I ever choose among them all, which to have in heaven ?

But God has chosen for me—Wilfy's immortal shape will be that of an eager and beautiful youth, with a golden halo round his head, ever making holy music.

STEPHEN

Yes ; that is the shape in which our beloved will always live before this congregation. And now, dear, that you are calm, I will go to my pulpit and preach of the True Immortality. Come !

[Draws her hand.]

MARY [*Again awaking, fiercely*]

Leave me with my dead !

STEPHEN

Your dead is not here, dear ; but as you have just said, in your heart and soul. Come ! I was to speak of our Founder's immortality ; now I must speak even more of Wilfred's.

MARY [*Eagerly*]

And you will tell them he lives with God ?

STEPHEN

With the God in *us*. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and our dear son's death will be transmuted to a higher form of life in the generations that his memory will inspire and his music uplift.

MARY [*As if dazed*]

In the generations ?

STEPHEN

Yes, I planned that he should succeed me. Fate has planned for him a truer apostolate. Sometimes, do you know, dear, the fear crossed my mind that I was unduly preferring Wilfred to Andrews, even preparing that worst of evils, an hereditary priesthood. Fate has set the balance just.

MARY

And you can think of *such* things !

STEPHEN

Now is the moment for thinking of them.

MARY [*Screaming*]

When Wilfy lies dead !

ANDREWS [*Passing outside*]

For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday.

YOUTHS [*Outside*]

Seeing that is past as a watch in the night.

[*Their voices grow inarticulate again.*]

MARY

Don't you hear them ? Wilfy is dead, I tell you.
And you can still talk *words* !

STEPHEN

But he is not dead, Mary, he will live in his music
and his——

MARY

Stop your *words* ! Can I embrace his music, and
feel its heart beating against mine ? Will it give me
kiss for kiss and pet word for pet word ?

STEPHEN

Death takes much : let us be thankful it cannot
take all.

MARY

Thankful ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Thankful because
it takes our beautiful boy and gives us a log !

STEPHEN

We had the joy of his rearing.

MARY

And the pain. How many nights have I sat at his
bedside, sick with fear ! And now, after eighteen
years of anxious growth, you tell me that all the glow
and genius of his young soul, all the love in his gentle
eyes, have faded to—this !

STEPHEN

What else can we conceive ? That he will live on in
a heaven, eternally eighteen ?

MARY

And why not ? There *must* be people of *all* ages in
heaven. [*Her face shines with a new hope.*] Yes, that
is why *children* die—I never understood it before—that
heaven may not lack little ones and so be less heaven ;

that there shall be croonings and crowings and the smiles of babies in all that ineffable splendour.

STEPHEN

My poor Mary ! Then your heaven is mere earth over again, and all the people who have once blundered into being are to be for ever. Eli Oakshott for example. Insanity is to be immortalised.

MARY [*Passionately*]

And is there not Time enough and Space enough and Power enough to set all these blunders straight ? Aren't you always talking of the infinities and the eternities ? Are there not stars enough, universes enough ? Or do you think I cannot wait à million years and journey a million million miles, if only it was to hear Wilfred say once again—“ Mother ! ”

STEPHEN

Such faith should move mountains. But alas ! only earthquake moves them.

ANDREWS [*Passing outside*]

But thou, O Eternal, wert, before the mountains were brought forth.

YOUTHS [*Outside*]

Or ever the earth and the world were made.

[*The voices die away.*]

MARY [*Mystically*]

Before the mountains ! Did you hear that ? God from everlasting ! And yet you say this is the end of Wilfy—this log that will soon be loathsome !

STEPHEN

You came to me just now, so confessing your belief—our belief.

MARY

Yes, before I knew *what* I was believing. As little as Wilfy knew.

STEPHEN

You knew better in your sober reason than now in your distraction.

MARY [*Fiercely*]

No! Reason is only words. Can one know love without loving? No more can one know loss without losing.

STEPHEN

I too have lost Wilfred.

MARY

And you are afraid of losing your miserable religion too! That is why you won't let your heart speak. I took your words for realities—now I see they are shadows. Now I know the truth.

STEPHEN

What truth do you know?

MARY [*Ecstatically*]

That Wilfred lives!

STEPHEN

How can you know it more than I ?

MARY

I know it here—in my heart—beneath which I carried him before you ever saw him. Do you think that that leaves no knowledge ? Do you think you can be as wise as I ?

STEPHEN

If it comforts you, dear, to believe it, believe it.
But I— *[Goes towards Temple door.]*

MARY [*Hysterical again*]

You are going to preach that my belief is a lie !

STEPHEN

I cannot cover up the truth with palms and lilies.

MARY

That's just what you *do* ; cover up *your* truth with flowers of speech. We can't drug ourselves, you said to me that dreadful day at Dymthorpe, we can't drug ourselves with dreams and myths. But what are all your fine words but drugs to drowse people to the dreadful thing you preach !

STEPHEN

I preach no drugs, I preach inspiring realities. My people are thinkers.

MARY

What inspiring realities do you preach ?

STEPHEN

I told you just now. That by our own labour we may shape this revolving wilderness to a world of peace and perfection.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

Yes ; and the hammer will always hit the anvil ! My curse on that law !

STEPHEN

Hush ! You said you understood.

MARY [*Bursting into sobs*]

I don't want your world of peace and perfection, I want my Wilfy.

STEPHEN

You must not talk so selfishly, dear. You are only one.

MARY [*Gulping down her sobs*]

And is anybody else more ? What is the world but a collection of ones ? And if each one is doomed like me to lose his best and dearest, where is your peace and perfection ?

•
STEPHEN

In the hearts that accept the law. Wilfred will live on in his music.

MARY [*Grimly*]

And where will Wilfy's music live ?

STEPHEN

In our congregation—in all of us.

MARY

Who will all die like Wilfy ?

STEPHEN

Sooner or later.

MARY

All of us turning like him into loathsome logs ! And our successors on the planet—logs in *their* turn. And so on and so on till this revolving graveyard is shrivelled up by a wandering star. And this you call an inspiring reality ! Say rather a dance of shadows—a rope of wind—a castle of cloud—a chasing of nightmares—vanity of vanities. [*Fiercely.*] What is the meaning of it all ?

STEPHEN

It is the great procession of life.

MARY [*Sobbing again*]

The great procession of death.

STEPHEN

The two are one. Only the elemental atom lives for ever. The price of true life is death.

MARY

Then has God no true life ?

STEPHEN

His life, too, is an eternal weaving and unweaving.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

But it is eternal.

STEPHEN

We are creatures of an hour. We cannot share His eternity.

MARY

And who would love a God who did not share His life with us ? A God who creates us to slay us, as pheasants are bred to be shot.

STEPHEN [*Looking up mystically*]

Though He slay us, yet must we trust in Him.

MARY

Yes ; to raise us up again ! Do you think I could bear to see even that log go from me if I thought this was the end ? Do you think I could bear to hear the earth dropping on the coffin and not go mad ? Do you think I would not run out into the streets and cry to the people : " Beware ! let there be no more marrying nor giving in marriage, for Death stalks around with his hammer, waiting to fell your children like bullocks " ? Stephen, do you really believe that

if you or I die, we shall meet no more for all eternity
and be nothing but decaying dust ?

STEPHEN

Oh, dearest, that is why we must cling to each other now. Don't you see how death vitalises every moment ?

MARY [*Shuddering*]

Paralyses every moment, you mean. How can we set our love on shadows ? No ! No ! Why do you trust so to appearances ? You who say that this solid-seeming matter is only a whirl of wild forces, that the very rocks are alive with radium ! Surely in all these mysteries that encompass us there is room for hope, surely we may open one little window to the sun.

ANDREWS [*Passing outside*]

Pet in the briefest life of man may be divine greatness and glory.

YOUTHS [*Outside*]

And in short measures life may perfect be.

STEPHEN

The circuits are over.

[*He moves resolutely towards the Temple door.*]

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

And you are going to kill their hope ! No ! No ! They have children too, husbands, wives, brothers,

sisters ! You shall not ! [Throws her arms round him.] I will not let you.

STEPHEN [*Freezingly, not struggling*]

Mary ! Remember, I am blind.

MARY [*Letting him go*]

Yes—blind indeed ! But I forbid you to infect others with your blindness.

STEPHEN [*Coldly*]

You forbid me ?

MARY

I forbid you to make this dark world darker. Blow out the last star and I will follow you into the pulpit.

STEPHEN

You ?

MARY

Yes, I. Let them hear a woman for once. You and your dried-up thinkers ! I tell you that the great live world will never *take* your religion, and that even if you deluded all male humanity, the *mothers* would rise up and tear it to pieces. [STEPHEN turns *silently and resumes his walk to the door.*] Go into your pulpit then. But—over the body of our boy—I dare you to tell them he is dead.

STEPHEN [*Turning, as at bay*]
And will you dare tell them he is alive ?

MARY [*In trumpet tones*]
I will tell them that this corruptible shall put on incorruption and this mortal immortality, and I will cry, O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?

[STEPHEN, his head bowed as beneath the storm, opens the door. The triumphant Requiem bursts out from organ and choir : " Rejoice, the righteous cannot die."]

STEPHEN [*Raising his head*]
Wilfred's music ! [He goes in firmly.]

MARY [*Snatching up a great lily, and uplifting it, her face ecstatically transfigured, her voice dominant even over the organ*]

The Resurrection and the Life !

[She stands over the body that is hidden by palms and lilies. The music swells out in loftier jubilation, the Curtain slowly falls.]

NOTE

*The performance of this play in Great Britain
is forbidden by the Lord Chamberlain. The
performing rights in all other countries are
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PRINTED BY
BALLANTYNE & COMPANY LTD
AT THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
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THE WAR GOD

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